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Domestic Enclosures: Liberation, Monstrosity, and Transformation in Latina Speculative
Expression

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Carolina D. Hernández-Bachman

June 2026

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Richard T. Rodríguez, Chairperson
Professor Magda García
Professor Courtney Baker

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2026

The Dissertation of Carolina D. Hernández-Bachman is approved:

Committee Chairperson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Domestic Enclosures: Liberation, Monstrosity, and Transformation in Latina Speculative Expression

by

Carolina D. Hernández-Bachman

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2026
Professor Richard T. Rodríguez, Chairperson

Gothic studies often understands the figure of the ghost as seeking resolution to unfinished business while monsters are understood for their “otherness.” In Latinx and Chicanx literary and cultural texts, however, ghosts and monsters instead move back and forth across borders or stay contained within homes as permanent embodiments of trauma that teach the next generation how to survive. Through gender studies, literary studies, and cultural studies, my project “Domestic Enclosures: Liberation, Monstrosity, and Transformation in Latina Speculative Expression” analyzes the (im)mobile bodies of monsters, plants, ghosts, and werewolves within texts including poetry, prose, and zines via my term “Domesticana Gothic.” Under capitalism and colonization, the state usurps people of color’s relationship to their own bodies, both infantilizing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) folks while robbing youths of color of the innocence that their white peers are afforded. Working within this contradiction, *Domestic Enclosures* asks readers to consider how childhood, for girls, queer and gender nonconforming kids,

is marked by moments of anxiety and possibility due to knowing one's body will be contained, pushed aside, or threatened in spaces such as the home, the legal system, and school. While gothic studies and Chicana feminist thought have described the domestic sphere as a paradoxical "prison," Chicana cultural productions themselves reveal, through their use of gothic conventions, how the paradoxical prisons of the home, classroom, and the border are premised upon the imprisonment of the mindbodyspirit. Utilizing the speculative as a hermeneutic to query how narratives of queer Latina and Chicana childhood negotiate death and transformation, my project's archive includes narratives that have been dubbed "gothic" as well as texts that have not been read as gothic but use gothic, horror, and science fiction conventions. I analyze home and death, simultaneously, as integral to resistance, such as spaces like the kitchen or bedroom and aesthetics of femininity and the rockera (rocker) misfit. My project joins emergent scholarship that retools literary genres, such as the gothic, folklore, horror, science fiction, and magical realism, to examine quotidian acts within racialized, gendered, and queer contexts.

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Introduction: Domestic Enclosures: Spectrality, Monstrosity, and Transformation in Latina Speculative Expression

In a 2025 exhibit at The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture in Riverside, California titled *Archaeology of Memory* (organized by Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive), Amalia Mesa-Bains's installation "Venus Envy Chapter 1" includes a rustic pearl-embellished white vanity stationed off-centered amid a backdrop of white, Austrian shade drapery. The vanity's similarly painted and extravagantly adorned chair is slightly open to the spectator and positioned in a way that resembles the act of encroaching upon a person's daily hair and makeup routine. This creates an internal focalizer that is deepened when one stares into the vanity's mirror and witnesses the encroachment of Mictecacihuatl, the goddess of death imprinted on the glass. The half-open drawers and abandoned chair narrativize the spectator into a scene of illness, apparitions, and death. In the room next door, a video plays of Amalia Mesa-Bains explaining this scene as an ofrenda, or altar, to her sister, Judy Mesa, who was ill for twenty years. In this homage, the vanity illustrates the act of getting ready, envisioning how Mesa-Bain's sister sat doing her hair and makeup all while facing the specter of death and "engag[ing] in the artifice of beauty" (Mesa-Bains in *Archaeology of Memory*).

Elizabeth Bronfen, in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*, asserts that violence within aesthetically beautiful art should be discussed rather than ignored, and within her study of sketches of ill and dying women by Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler, asks us whether we, as spectators of images of death, should distance ourselves from the subject matter or "assume the position of a morally involved spectator,

treating the represented body as though it were the same as the material body it refers to” (45). In taking the position of morally involved spectator, Hodler adds that these images “appear monstrous” and unsettling (45). In narrativizing the experience of her dying sister, Mesa-Bains introduces the spectator to that open seat of the vanity where one faces death and gets ready for the day.



Figure 1: “Venus Envy I (or The First Holy Communion Moments Before the End),” 1993/2022(detail); courtesy the artist and the Rena Bransten Gallery; Amalia Mesa-Bains; photo: Katherine du Tiel.

The framed photographs of sister allow what Avery Gordon calls a “seething absence” of her ghost, or what is unseen, absent, or that demands attention as she describes “seething absences” that are felt but not materially, physically present. Through defamiliarizing a daily occurrence for us all—engaging in the artifice of getting ready for the day—Mesa-Bains demonstrates the unsettling “seething absence” that her sister leaves as a Latina and daughter of immigrants (Gordon). Even as the art invites our bodies, we are made aware of Judy Mesa’s body that fought an auto-immune disease for 20 years by her photograph, her favorite chocolates placed on the vanity, and iconography of the Virgin Mary, nuns, and brides which point to the limited roles offered to Catholic Mexican and Mexican American women. Here, Mesa-Bains speculates possibilities outside of these roles through both the abundance of feminine accessories paired with absence. Right across from this ofrenda are vitrines holding found objects from First Communion and girls dressed in white, blurring the lines between marriage and coming-of-age rituals and revealing the containment of childhood. The found objects and Do-It-Yourself sensibility ask how these seething absences call attention to containment that structures like the family and religion from childhood to adulthood construct through its referential Catholic communion accessories and feminine aesthetics. I am reminded of my Tia Maria Elena’s death at five years old whose absence/presence never left my family as well as the child brides, including my mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. How are Latina artists speculating life through death to illustrate embodied and hypervisible forms of haunting within childhood as migration, histories of racial violence, and discourse of gender and sexuality confine girls, queer kids, and gender nonconforming children?

Calling attention to these structures as well as speculating the possibilities of life beyond them are central to the work of Latina and Chicana artists that I examine in my dissertation. Ghosts and monsters become conduits for which to speculate, and thus, I am interested in the speculative and what it means to speculate. In literary discussions, a definition for the speculative has been contended for the ways that genres work to categorize, delineate, and draw boundaries which is contradictory to the nature of speculating, speculation, and the speculative. Catherine S. Ramírez defines “speculative fiction” as “an umbrella term that encompasses science fiction and fantasy,” as her coined term “Chicanafuturism” is concerned with “cultural production that attends to cultural transformations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology, and the future” (QTD in Ramírez x). Furthermore, in *Dear Incomprehension: On American Speculative Fiction* (2022), Stéphane Vanderhaeghe points to the contradiction that is drawing boundaries and borders when defining “speculative” as these lines negate the work that speculating specifically aims to do. Vanderhaeghe claims:

all discourse is or becomes speculative as soon as it ceases to refer to anything known or knowable, to anything given, fixed, and stable, as soon as it relinquishes all claims to certainty, to any form of authority that it challenges and undermines in the process of its own utterance. The speculative thus strives to come into being while paradoxically aiming at self- erasure in the same gesture, avoiding all closure. (4)

Vanderhaeghe's description of the processes by which discourse becomes speculative and how the speculative is based on the unknowable is reminiscent of Mesa-Bain's installation and how the installation grapples with the uncertainty of death, the turbulence of being confined to gender roles within Mexican culture stemming from childhood, and the work that psychic and geographic borders do to maintain heteropatriarchal control and to construct objects of fear. The absence of the flesh with remaining traces of that presence are similarly evoked in Sonia Madrigal's project "La muerte sale por el Oriente / Intervención" where photographs of a mirror in the shape of a woman are situated in public places across Chimalhuacán, Neza and Valle de Chalco in order to address femicide in Mexico. Madrigal and Mesa-Bain's work speculates presence; in their work, absence of flesh and felt presence moves viewers to speculate the next step of the person absent in the work—What happened (or could have) happened before, during, and after death and disappearance? What life did she or could she have lived? What point(s) of connection might we have with her? While there is no flesh, there remains shape and orientation toward a direction—for instance, Mesa-Bain's positioning of the chair and half-opened drawers and reflecting mirror back towards the viewer, or Madrigal's positioning of the mirror silhouette as the focal point of each landscape reflecting part of that landscape otherwise not in the frame back to the viewer.

I mobilize the speculative for how it is entangled in the act of worldbuilding and worldbreaking for Latina artists and authors, and part of this sensibility is evident in Mesa-Bain's concept of the "domesticana." Discussed in chapter one, domesticana refers to the unique Chicana sensibility in visual art that aligns and expands from aspects

of *rasquachismo*, or Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's theorization of "making do." Specific in the *domesticana* is the paradox in which Chicanas live their lives. As a queer Chicana, I am familiar with the daily paradoxes within the *domesticana* that include but are not limited to feeling like an outsider within both Chicano and American culture (which theorist and poet Gloria Anzaldúa speaks about), finding within the home both a sense of belonging, resistance, a sense that we must contort and limit ourselves in order to belong, and a humor that is familiar in the art of enduring. *Domesticana* sensibility means that the Chicana artist "employs the material of the domestic as she contests the power relations located within it" (302). Here, everyday practices and objects of femininity (see Mesa-Bains's feminine white décor) become part of the sensibility engaged with contesting power relations, and I suggest there is a speculation to this contestation.

Scholars in Latinx studies like Laura Pérez and Debra A. Castillo have connected *rasquachismo* to the speculative as a mode of production which Latinx cultural producers are engaged with. I aim to similarly explore "*domesticana*" alongside the speculative, particularly for certain chapters, the gothic, through my term "*domesticana gothic*." According to William A. Calvo-Quirós, speculative cultural productions are essential parts of survival that allow for "envision[ing], enact[ing], and workin[ing] toward an alternative world" in order to "bridge into a world of possibilities" since "for those at the margins, the realm of the imaginary becomes a medium to envision and put into practice an "alternative" world," one that emerges both from lived experiences and from aesthetic stipulations, language provisions, and cultural categories" (157). Following Calvo-Quirós, I merge the speculative, gothic, and *domesticana* in a dialogue that recognizes the

act of envisioning worlds. This project primarily focuses on Chicana artists but is also interested in U.S. Latina speculative cultural production more generally as I include authors and artists of Central and South American heritage. Mesa-Bains' artwork contains this speculating impulse, and I extend this to figurations of the speculative, in particular, gothic, magic, and horror as these generic forms of expression grapple with monster-making and the specterly.

The simultaneous absence and presence is suggestive of the figure of the ghost, and I am interested in how ghosts, monsters, plants, and werewolves factor into landscapes that aim to address heteropatriarchal violence and racism. While I look at the ways that Latina artists and authors speculate possibilities outside of containment, I must also add that speculating can exist in the form of disruption (or temporality or geography), worldbuilding, and transformation. Transformation is significant to speculating, and I return to Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of the creative process as "an agency of transformation" that "heal(s) or restructure(s) the images/stories that shape a person's consciousness" to demonstrate how Latinas and Chicanas link transformation and healing within the creative process (35). Dreams take center stage as Anzaldúa aligns dreams with reality in a speculative turn, suggesting that "dreams, too, are a form of experience, a dimension in which life and mind seem to be embedded" (35). By investigating the speculative, I also build from Vanderhaeghe's notion that "the point may not be to project or question the possibility of a (future, distant, utopian, or dystopian) world, or hypothesize about the ramifications and offshoots of the present, so much as to muddle, confuse, fade out the contours of the known world—to abstract it

from the very heart of representation” (5). Anticipation and confrontation become key components of speculating, and therefore, I turn to gothic literary studies and monster studies theories for their expansion on topics of ghosts, terror, horror, and monster-making processes.

Haunted Children

A thread of this project is how children, particularly queer femmes, are represented within speculative work as their liminality and medial space of identity formation crosspollinate with figures in flux, in flight, and in stagnation such as the monster, werewolf, plant, and the ghost. Moreover, I am interested in how categorizations and laws affect how their bodies are encroached upon, contained, or pushed aside as I cite past and continued mistreatment of children at the border who are torn from their families as well as undocumented Latinx youth of color whose unique voices rise above constant attempts at silencing. Representations of the child in Latinx literature have been observed yet more must be said about representations of the child in speculative cultural production that scholars like Cristina Rhodes, Trevor Buffone, and Cristina Herrera explore in their work. I examine representations of childhood in texts that look toward childhood in retrospect as they grapple with hauntings and representations of childhood from the perspective of youth narrators intended for adolescent audiences. Both are important for how they use the medial space of childhood to lean into formations of identity negotiated under the spectral and monstrous. In addition, I am interested in how liberation and outsider identities come forth from hauntings in Latina cultural production when we consider the national narratives and

rhetoric that promote ideas of coloniality and the domestic sphere's role in Latinx and Chicanx communities.

Chicana feminists have written about the paradoxes of domesticity and how the domestic sphere simultaneously upholds a sense of belonging and expression away from White America, yet it remains an oppressive force for queer and femme folks growing up. Moreover, this paradox adds to decades of infantilization that makes it so that Latinas, particularly queer Latinas, are perpetually infantilized into adulthood and questioned on whether or not they can govern their bodies. In comparing European gothic uses of infantilization, Suzanne Manizza Roszak notes that gothic infantilization in American writing in instances like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" functions as imprisonment. Her extension of reviewing gothic infantilization in Latin American literature influences my approach to discuss the phenomenon of representations of childhood in cultural production by U.S. Latina and Chicana artists that negotiate borders. In a U.S. and transnational context, my work is influenced by Mary Pat Brady's work on scales and childhood in *Scales of Captivity: Racial Capitalism and the Latinx Child* (2021) to further probe how infantilization of BIPOC bodies is deployed using speculative and gothic tropes. To this, I pose how infantilization changes or remains the same in texts that grapple with race, gender, sexuality, and borders alongside representations of childhood.

Speculating Possibility: Methods of Articulating Hauntings

Media continues to construct BIPOC and immigrant folks as monsters via "hoards" and "migrant caravan" rhetoric that pushes the ideology which paints them as

penetrating and contaminating the hegemonic “national” body, and one can see how these ideologies produce BIPOC and immigrant people as unintelligible. Gothic and horror studies scholar Jack Halberstam contends that monsters are meaning machines, asserting that traditional Gothic novels are “technologies that produce the monster as remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body” which can “represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative” (21). Similarly, as I will speak on later, coloniality makes it so that these hypervisible Others are also erased and invisibilized, and the stories of these generations continue to haunt. The true terror and horror that BIPOC authors describe brings into question the technologies that operate to create this “foreign” and Othered body.

My work is indebted to scholarship on BIPOC gothic literary production, particularly the rich body of scholarship on black gothic and horror literature that elaborate on the ways that black authors reposition whiteness to highlight how racial construction imprison and efface BIPOC subjects “by a society of of systemic whiteness” (Wester 69). In “The Gothic in and as Race Theory,” Maisha Wester contextualizes Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* (1992) and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) towards readings of black gothic literary production such as Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946) to discuss how black novelists use gothic elements “in order to reveal how systemic racism and racist ideology produces black monstrosity” even as these texts are not immediately recognized as gothic. Wester calls for revisiting novels by black English and American authors in order to review them as gothic due to their usage of tropes such as entrapment “within fictional Gothic

narrative” that “produc[e] real horror for the person cast as monstrous” (60). Thus, Wester calls for an re-examination and definition of gothic based on time, form, and geography. Monster-making is central to gothic literature, and typically, the conservative nature of the gothic renders foreign and non-white as “Other.” By viewing gothic as race theory, Wester notes how black authors query this process of monster-making.

When monsters are constructed, looking at the systems that participate and perpetuate these racial constructions is key. Therefore, we must view encounters and contact zones from which children begin to view themselves through these institutions. For instance, the family and the school system are two of many institutions which young people encounter that aim to categorize and construct monstrous bodies. For Latinx and immigrant children, and personally, as a daughter of immigrants with transnational family relations growing up, the border is a part of this. I am interested in how the U.S.-Mexico border constructs the Other. Mary Pat Brady’s theorization of the border as an “abjection machine” which “transform[s] people into “aliens,” “illegals,” “wetbacks,” or “undocumented” works to render people unintelligible and “outside the real and the human” in order to “erase the signs of its labor” including its violence (50). In chapter one and chapter four, the monster is the central body that is analyzed for how Latina and Chicana cultural producers relate BIPOC and queer childhood to reveal how the monster-making process is the horror.

Haunting also prioritizes space and place as ghosts typically haunt spaces such as houses, roads, and in general, imaginaries. In repositioning the ghost’s necessity for articulation, I am in dialogue with Kathleen Brogan’s “cultural haunting” which posits

that hauntings which permeate generations need to translate a ghost's trauma to prevent from being "stuck" in the past. In what ways do acts of translating the past and integrating into an imagined present to proceed with a future conflict with how space and bodies, in gothic and horror texts, carry with them histories of colonization? Brady argues that space is part of social processes, claiming, "interactions with space are not merely schematic but also highly affective; places are felt and experiences, and the processes producing space therefore also shape feelings and experiences" (8). Brady's approach to space and place as being interactive and implicated within social processes influences how I approach the home, the classroom, the hospital, the U.S.-Mexico border, and the church as physical places that Latina authors and artists navigate as paradoxes due to their being formative to the child and also limiting, particularly for queer Latinas. How do these spaces and places then conjure their own ghosts? Ghosts, monsters, plants, and werewolves in Latina and Chicana cultural production work beyond temporal boundaries to express the feeling of the effects of the social processes and to imagine worlds where hauntings and the haunted are indistinguishable.

Intersectional Feminism and Decolonial Approaches to Speculating

Hauntings hold an opportunity to explore the over-embodied and invisibilization that young girls are subjected to, specifically girls of color and queer, gender non-conforming girls of color. My intersectional feminist approach to this project allows me to take on a transnational lens to Latina literary and cultural production. Coined by law professor Kimberle Crenshaw, "intersectionality" is a feminist framework that considers the multiply-burdened, marginalized individual and denies single-axis frameworks that

erase women of color who undergo sex and race discrimination (57). I merge intersectionality with what Sonia Saldivar-Hull describes as “feminism on the border,” or a third world feminist view that deconstructs geopolitical boundaries as well as:

[...] acknowledges the often vast historical, class, racial, and ethnic differences among women living on the border, but the nature of hegemony practiced by the united powers of patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy promotes an illusion of an irreconcilable split between feminists confined within national borders. (7)

Through intersectionality and feminism on the border, I am able to theorize how Latina speculative expression grapples with issues such as racial violence, sexism, and homophobia that affects Latinx populations on both sides of the border. I situate myself alongside scholars such as Crenshaw and Saldívar-Hull as I extend their theories to further probe the place of the gothic and horror in Chicana Feminist Thought.

My project’s interdisciplinary approach is motivated by how storytelling gets mapped onto the body and how knowledge is produced from felt experience. Emma Pérez critiques how Mexican American history, in particular, has been narrativized and kept track of. She informs readers of the fictionalizing of this history which works under the logic of coloniality, producing a Chicana/o history that devalues women’s contributions and reveres masculinist views while negating femme history. Pérez wishes to remove the “his” from Chicana history as under this historiography, Chicana women are only understood for their association to Chicano men. Despite being literate and polylingual herself, “[La Malinche’s] words were not transcribed by anyone who may

have listened at a time when orality was the method of passing tales to the next generation” (xv). I apply Pérez’s approach to the significance of Latina and Chicana cultural production beyond the literary, published text. While I will be working with literary publications, I also intend to include literary productions that highlight oral storytelling modes as well as other cultural productions such as music, art, and zines. Doing this is important to capturing Latina knowledges and contributions rather than sidelining them.

As I work with texts by Latina and Chicana artists, psychic and material borders take a central focus; gothic and horror literary studies conventionally read containment as sites of resolution which contends with how Latino/a studies relates containment and borders to coloniality, power, and control of knowledge production. Aníbal Quijano discussed coloniality as it pertains to hegemony and knowledge production in his foundational essay “Coloniality of Power and Social Classification.” He defines coloniality as colonization continuing through racial divisions and identifies seventeenth century Europe as a moment where knowledge production was centralized and naturalized as “rational” to maintain hegemony, claiming that through Eurocentrism, this was done to “render an account of the cognitive needs of capitalism: measurement, quantification, and the externalization (objectification) of the knowable with respect to the knower in order to control people’s relations with nature and among people with respect to nature, especially ownership of the means of labor” (96). In turn, knowledge was characterized by the “means of knowing [...] termed “rational,” giving to it its character and Eurocentric origins” while knowledges that did not fit this quantification

were dismissed as not rational or valuable (96). This echoes what Toni Morrison writes in *Beloved* is the binary between the definer and the defined. Quijano writes that classification was “imposed and acknowledged in the whole of the capitalist world as the only valid rationality as well as the emblem of modernity” (96). What interests my project is how what is felt, unseen, and understood by hauntings by Latina writers and artists are expressed with figures and symbols that move between national borders and refute categorization. This rejects the binaries of what is considered definable, legitimized knowledge, especially when one considers the role of dreaming, speculating, and transformation as part of the creative process and dynamic expression of the self amid monster-making processes.

I link Walter Mignolo’s “border thinking” to the expansion of gothic studies that Maisha Westerl Xavier Aldana Reyes, Ben Olguín, and Cathryn Merla-Watson aim towards as they locate connections between gothic studies and horror studies, cultural studies, and speculative production by BIPOC authors in the twentieth and twenty-first century. In *Local Histories/ Global Designs* Walter Mignolo locates colonial difference as both physical and imaginary where “the coloniality of power is at work in the confrontation of two kinds of local histories displayed in different spaces and times across the planet (ix). In stating how colonial difference “is the space where coloniality of power is enacted,” Mignolo points to the eradication of knowledge under coloniality which prescribes with the dangerous narrative that “people with history could write the history of those people without” (ix). Thus, in his discussion on “gnosis” and “epistemologies,” Mignolo theorizes “border thinking” as emerging from “the space

where the restitution of subaltern knowledge is taking place” in order to characterize “a powerful and emergent gnoseology, absorbing and displacing hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern” (12). Border thinking allows for the expanding of literary production and modes that gothic studies recognizes, and which Xavier Aldana Reyes and Maisha Wester assert that reading gothic texts through a “mode” rather than for a certain literary production that relies on limited geographical and temporal scope that works to delegitimize BIPOC cultural producers. On Latinx speculative cultural production, Ben Olguín and Cathryn Merla-Watson note that referring to Chican@ and Latin@ speculative arts does not mean denoting “mimetic acts or simple permutations of what has been historically been a largely white, male, Eurocentric, and heteronormative genre” but towards an “altermundos” or exploration of the speculative. With Wester, Reyes, Olguín, and Merla-Watson, I build upon a coalescence of gothic, horror, monster-making, and transformative methods to border thinking that reimagines ideas of hauntings and speculates difficult realities and “what ifs” all at once.

Hauntings operate within psychic and material realities, and my project is concerned with the hauntings that follow generations of Latinas in childhood, a formative stage of life, which are articulated through methods like unpacking folklore symbols for the sexual violence that they have caused. Border thinking helps us approach the topic with considerations of expression that work beyond those confines. To deconstruct aesthetics, for which genres like gothic and horror are discussed through, visual studies

scholar Kency Cornejo adds to Quijano's discussion by analyzing aesthetics, linking the creation and consumption of art aesthetics to knowledge production where:

[aesthetics] is a historically determined Western notion and invented formal category with which to theorize the senses of a human subject. It reflected a set of principles determined by European intellectual men that focused on specific human subjects whose senses and subjectivity they believed were the only ones that mattered—themselves. Taste was considered a matter of reflection on the senses that only the evolutionary superior species could engage. (12)

Therefore, knowledge production in the form of literature and art are classified through Quijano's analysis of coloniality, and Cornejo links to this logics as well, noting how feminist theorists, such as Maria Lugones, "further expand coloniality to include overlooked gendered-raced-sexualities, exposing gender, gendered logics, and the category of "woman" to be additional colonial concepts" (Cornejo 13). Thinking through Cornejo, especially in the final chapter, allows me to visualize how knowledge production is limited to certain genres, uses of genre, and form which Latina, Central American, and Chicana artists make deliberate moves to challenge and resist. Thus, my project contains analysis of experimental poetry, fiction, art, video, and zines that deploy the Do-It-Yourself sensibility of artmaking and knowledge production. Within these, narratives of monster-making are critiqued, and ghosts are articulated through hauntings. Tying visual studies by building from scholars like Cornejo and, earlier mentioned, Amalia Mesa-Bains, I am able to elaborate on the forms and methods that Latinas and

Chicanas use to remix, engage with, and resist certain narratives that have material and embodied consequences; speculating then becomes liberatory.

Doesn't Magic Only Homogenize? The Latinx Gothic and Magical Realism Debate

In response to the homogenization of magical realist interpretations of Latinx texts that reject potential interpretations like gothic or horror, recent scholarship on the Latinx gothic emphasizes instead how Latinx gothic texts explore the very real histories and lived experiences of racial formation and its haunting effects. For instance, in analyzing Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (1995), Tanya González argues for reading the gothic in Latinx texts, contending that we look beyond magical realism since, "when ghosts or supernatural occurrences appear in [Latinx and Chicanx] texts, the first association made is with Latin American magical realism" (2007, 46). González suggests that categorizing texts like Moraga's as magical realism rejects other possible investigations of the text's themes that would be more evident in a gothic reading of a text. Similarly, Cathryn Merla-Watson and B.V. Olguín define the Latinx gothic as category-defying gothic horror which relays the real lived experiences and oppressions that communities of color have and continue to endure (2017). Merla-Watson and Olguín insist on the gothic as a mode of reading to reexamine the horrors of state-sanctioned violence and reveal historical atrocities. However, magic is excluded in this interpretation, too. I am interested in investigating the role of magic outside of its association with magical realism and toward the supernatural which includes ghosts and monsters. Outside of Latinx literary studies, Lucie Armitt compares the usages of gothic tropes by magical realist texts against the slippages of gothic texts into magical realist

narrative strategies, writing that the texts use elements of the other; nonetheless, she argues that gothic and magical realist texts maintain their generic categories, respectively. Although I concur with Armitt, Merla-Watson, and Olguín's insistence to notice slippages between magical, gothic, and horror tropes, respectively, I align with Kinitra Brooks who is invested in how Black women authors redefine and rework speculative genres including what she terms fluid fiction, or, "the purposeful blending of the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror" that black women genre writers employ to "achieve a radical black female subjectivity that openly challenges the exhausted doctrines of genre fiction" (12). I argue, through merging "Domesticana" alongside discussions of the "domestic gothic," "female gothic," and "Latina gothic," that blending and "making do" of "Domesticana" aesthetics locates "paradoxical prisons" of queer Chicana literature and domestic gothic conventions, including the queering of genres, literary elements, and living/dead worlds (Mesa-Bains). While I am sympathetic to the arguments pertaining to the dominant and homogenizing magical realist interpretations of Latinx gothic texts, I contend that magic, outside of magical realist configurations, alongside queering the poetic conventions and generic binaries, must be examined as an element of the Latina gothic in order to understand the unseen, patriarchal and racist oppressions; in doing so, domestic spaces and childhood allow moments for connection and enchantment in order to survive and thrive.

Domesticana Gothic

Drawing a line across how the gothic studies scholars and Chicana feminist scholars discuss contradictions, psychological prisons, and feminist critique, I build from

Amalia Mesa-Bains's domesticana, a concept that highlights Chicana rasquache sensibility, home life, and contradiction, with Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith's renditions of the female gothic which illuminates the limitations of the home and family life that women are relegated to and submerged by. This, in addition to consideration of Latinx speculative expression and the issues that Latinx and immigrant folks undergo, allow me to investigate contradiction, grotesque, and gothic enclosures that mark Latinx childhood. This intersection is a necessary lens that reveals how Chicana and Latina artists and authors mobilize gothic, horror, magic, and rasquache sensibilities that create a patchwork of speculating transformative possibilities and survival modes against heteropatriarchal violence which I term "domesticana gothic."

Chapter 1 "Domesticana Gothic: Domestic Enclosures in Vanessa A. Villarreal's *Beast Meridian* (2017) and Myriam Gurba's *Painting Their Portraits in Winter* (2015)," analyzes how Villarreal and Gurba imbue gothic elements into magical realist narratives, even as these are traditionally regarded as distinct genres, to depict childhood as a time when queer Chicanas are rendered hypervisible in their supposed excess and monstrosity within spaces like the school and the home. Through sociologist Avery Gordon's theorization of sociological hauntings, I explore the hauntings of social institutions like the aforementioned school, home, hospital, and legal system; yet, I extend Gordon's hermeneutic of the ghost to suggest that monsters also haunt, and are haunted by, systems as the monster's body is encouraged to hide, disappear, and render itself invisible within enclosed spaces due to its grotesqueness. I am interested in how bodies are made abject, monstrous, and ghostly under social institutions that, under coloniality, partake in the

categorization of bodies that begins at a young age. With this in mind, I build from Shantel Martinez and Kelly Medina-Lopez's concept of the "Latindigenous" that prioritizes the material and situates home as "for many marginalized and displaced peoples, a sense of belonging is always haunted through historical exclusion from an original homespace. This exclusion further manifests as limited control over our own bodies" which is especially important considering that childhood, particularly adolescence, is recognized as a moment where gaining autonomy and independence is expected. What feelings arise when this autonomy is withheld and suspended by systems of power, including patriarchy and the aforementioned social institutions?

Chapter 2 "La Llorona's Outsider and DIY Ethos," builds from Catherine Spooner's cultural studies approach to the gothic, which extends the literary genre to include Goth fashion, to illustrate how queer Chicana writers and zine-makers utilize Goth, punk, and misfit fashioning to repair and heal from the horrors of La Llorona's story that have imprinted their bodies. In viewing La Llorona as a horror tale, a move away from how it is often viewed as a cautionary tale, exposes its origins and upholding of heteropatriarchal violence. I analyze how these misfit fashionings of the body become a tool for grotesque transformations through the admiration of Goth musical icons, dressing in all-black, and painting the faces to reaffirm bodily autonomy after years of violence against femme and nonbinary bodies. Merging a concept that stems from visual and cultural productions with a literary studies approach is needed in order to analyze both visual, literary, and Do-It-Yourself works like the zine that utilize both the visual and written word. In addition, this cross also highlights the symbolic representation of

key figures like La Llorona that get recirculated, remixed, and enter new modes and genres.

Stephan Duncombe describes zines, in the age of corporate media, are:

independent and localized, coming out of cities, suburbs and small towns across the US, assembled on kitchen tables. They celebrate the everyperson in a world of celebrity. Losers in a society that rewards the best and the brightest. Rejecting the corporate dream of an atomized population broken down into discrete and instrumental target markets, zine writers form networks and forge communities around diverse identities and interests. (7)

The mundanity of topics and D.I.Y. ephemeral quality of zines lend itself to express speculative domesticity within childhood during formative years. The methods can crosspollinate with the collage, or in Ree Artemisa's case, with retablo and comic styles, to depict Chicana spirituality that comes through when one is haunted or is the one doing the haunting. In turn, this highlights what Brenda Selena Lara calls "epistemic hauntings," or "a form of haunting that reveals a deceased and living individual's suppressed knowledge and delegitimized knowledge to expose an ongoing injustice" (91). Through the deaths of Central American refugee Reyna Marroquin and trans-identifying women Francia Camila and Jade Quintanilla, the ghost not only haunts but is haunted by injustices. Ongoing injustices in the home take place in the private space but are part of epidemics of domestic and sexual violences against women of color, girls, queer femmes, and gender nonconforming Latinx folks. This connects with my third chapter on a young adult novel that centers an undocumented protagonist who remains in

isolation due to her undocumented status and lycanthropy that make her a vulnerable person. Isolation, both psychological and physical, is considered domestic abuse, and we can turn to Mamacita's character from *The House on Mango Street* as an example of how the United State's hostile treatment of immigrants pushes immigrants into isolation.

Chapter 3 "Re-Writing the Body: Lycanthropy, Nerds, and Outsiders in Romina Garber's *Wolves of No Worlds*," shifts closest to examining childhood within media aimed at children. The chapter analyzes the queer potential of gender, sexuality, and desire in Garber's young adult series *Wolves of No World* through an undocumented teen werewolf protagonist, Manu, while also discussing the constraints of the family to a young adult audience. In contrast to werewolves in mainstream teen media, here the werewolf body becomes empowered by its ecological connection to the world. *Wolves of No World* is based on folklore, and Norma Alarcón's analysis of how Chicana and Latina poets challenge the transmission of folklore to fit a particular, heterosexist narrative about gender and sexuality is key to my study of this text. I am also in discussion with emerging scholarship on speculative Latinx young adult literature that explores topics of queerness and queer identity to determine how *Wolves of No World* grapples with these topics.

Finally, Chapter 4, "There Comes a Time When the Sun is Defiant" : Ecologies and Domesticana Gothic in Space and Place" describes how Carribean Fragoza, Helena Maria Viramontes, and Beatriz Cortez use nature, in its grotesque environmental sublimity, to depict a disjointed temporality that underscores a feminist understanding of plants and coloniality. Fragoza shows that domestic enclosures are the spaces where

women and girls are most likely to encounter danger due to the horrors of sexual and physical violence within the home. Similarly, Viramontes's "The Moths" has been analyzed for its eco-feminist leanings, and I aim to examine its speculative, gothic, and eco-feminist leanings specifically to discuss how plants, in their excess, open up vistas for flight and creative expression in Chicana literature. On the other hand, Cortez repositions the childhood bedroom by transporting it into the logics of plants where plants grow all over and all around to demonstrate decay and reveal the instability of childhood via space.

I contribute to scholarly conversations of the gothic, contemporary Chicana and Latina literary and cultural works, and Young Adult literature by centering the queer Latinx and Chicanx child—a figure understudied through the growing lens of the gothic—by studying its representation within racialized and gendered narratives in order to reveal its haunting characteristics, particularly during a time when the rights of femme and queer children of color are in danger. Vanessa Angélica Villarreal and Myriam Gurba expand this lens of the gothic through childhood experience and the magical.

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Domesticana Gothic: Domestic Enclosures in Vanessa A. Villarreal's *Beast Meridian* (2017) and Myriam Gurba's *Painting Their Portraits in Winter* (2015)

Magic and spectrality's folkloric and gothic ties have largely been left out of Latina gothic and Latinx gothic scholarly discussions despite their recurrence in the writing process of Chicanas. For instance, in a 2024 interview with Rough Cut Press, author Myriam Gurba explains how magic became a part of her gothic writing process, "I came into magic [...] I began to make more and more explicit appeals to ancestral spirits [...] so I fused my practice of ancestor veneration with my writing practice—this was how I cultivated magic into the literary process." Similarly, author Carribean Fragoza, in an interview with *Alta Journal* (2021), locates the magical and the grotesque in her writing process, stating, "when we talk about [...] magical things happening [...] or [...] grotesque things happening, they're just actually part of the world that we all live in." I argue that Latina gothic scholarship, as a field interested in the intersections and reinvention of the gothic genre, investigates how authors use the ghostly, monstrous, and the magical to interpret the everyday experiences of queer young girls through my term "domesticana gothic."

Drawing from Amalia Mesa-Bains's concept "domesticana," signifying a feminist rasquachismo that seeks to question power relations, the domesticana gothic animates a "vein of magical thinking" invested in blending elements and focalizes the socially spectral to destabilize the invisible-yet-felt racist and sexist structures that work to maintain colonial amnesia (Villarreal 2023); the unveiling of these mechanisms is characteristic to the gothic mode because in gothic texts "the past chokes the present"

(Spooner 18-19). The domesticana gothic theorizes an embodied approach and retains a sense of the magical within the Latina gothic to interpret traumas and build a culturally and geographically specific epistemology. A reading of Vanessa Angélica Villarreal's *Beast* and Myriam Gurba's *Painting Their Portraits in Winter* illuminates how terror, horror, and magic are embodied in queer Chicana writing through spectral figures, outsiders, and monstrous bodies.

The magic informing the writing process of Gurba, Fragoza, and Villarreal energizes their fiction and poetry, and I explore this dark, magical impulse through my concept of the “Domesticana gothic.” Tying world-ending and world-building, Zoraida Cordova published *Reclaim the Stars: 17 Tales Across Realms and Space*, an anthology of stories of Latinx authors that feature magic, ghosts, and science fiction. In her 2022 interview with *Refinery29*, Cordova notes how, “Magic, superstition, this apocalyptic feel—[it all] feels entrenched into our communities, whether it's by history or by current events” as she links the project to projects such as *A Phoenix First Must Burn* by Patrice Caldwell in addition to projects on East and South Asian reimaginings of folklore and myth. Within this discussion of magic feeling entrenched in our communities, I aim to reveal how private spaces, namely the home, partake in this. Thus, I investigate how these authors deploy the Domesticana gothic within the bildungsroman through the ghostly, monstrous, and the magical to interpret quotidian experiences of Chicanas and to heal from legacies of heteropatriarchal violence.

The Supernatural, Magical, and Speculative in Latina Gothic Bildungsroman

The domesticana gothic helps us to consider the spectral, monstrous, and domestic that animate the Latina gothic bildungsroman. The domesticana gothic, as it pertains to domesticity and the gothic, is indebted to Amalia Mesa-Bains's "domesticana" alongside discussions that link the domestic to a blending or DIY-ing of aesthetics and genres. Following Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's "rasquachismo," or a sensibility of "making do" found in working class Chicano everyday life and aesthetics that affirm community survival and resistance, Mesa-Bains defines domesticana as the Chicana counterpart to rasquachismo located within the domestic. According to Mesa-Bains:

The Chicana strategies of domesticana that emerge from the spaces of femininity, such as the bedroom, the kitchen, and the yard, retake the gaze, the centrality for its own meaning and begin to reposition the Chicana through the reworking of feminine space. (306)

Therefore, the domesticana centralizes the domestic and recognizes efforts by Chicana artists as well as Chicana writers and poets, to develop domesticity as a site of tension and paradox for "as the signs of making do are both affirmation of the domestic life and resistance to the subjugation of women in the domestic sphere" (306). While Mesa-Bains writes about visual art, I apply her theorizations of the domesticana to Chicana gothic literary production because of the ways in which she ties domesticity to both a paradise and a prison for Chicanas, revealing how Chicanas utilize paradox to affirm their survival, reminiscent of texts within the generic categorization that is the female gothic. In a totalizing review of the female or feminine gothic scholarship and literature, Diana

Wallace and Andrew Smith trace the delineation of female gothic, a literary field of scholarship stemming from the term originated by Ellen Moers that examines the connection between women and the gothic. Wallace and Smith extend this study as they amplify scholars interested in the feminist, feminine, lesbian gothic, and postfeminist gothic literary scholarship which seek to expand Moers's and other feminist literary critics' interest in connecting feminism and the gothic. Moreover, Wallace and Smith categorize gothic literary scholarship written by women or with femme protagonists as the female gothic field shifts between psychoanalytic readings and historicist or politicized readings of gothic literature and mode. Within this study, I also recognize the Latina gothic as an emerging and rich field wherein similar prisons of patriarchy and questions of mobility are explored, and I intend to locate Mesa-Bain's notion of domesticana within a Latina gothic thus resulting in the Domesticana gothic.

The domesticana gothic locates magic, domesticity, and enclosures in representations of the otherworldly, spectral, and supernatural; it locates the felt and the unseen, including effects of racism, sexism, and queerphobia, thus providing room where genre blending reflects lived experience in order to provide a space for connection and pass on methods of survival. I build on Shantel Martinez and Kelly Medina-Lopez's LatIndigenous theories of spectrality that connect "tangible, haunted geographies to settler-colonialism" (9). More specifically, I extend Cathryn Merla-Watson's LatIndigenous framework that destabilizes domestic horror and feminist gothic categorizations mobilized in her term MeXicana Gothic, a reading tool that considers the material reality of Latinas. Simultaneously, Merla-Watson's attention to the ghostly

matter of La Llorona in Sandra Cisneros's "Woman Hollering Creek" is useful to my understanding of the ghostly as both material and affective, embedded and found in silences and absences. The domesticana gothic also understands ghosts similar to Avery Gordon's framework which discusses the socially spectral wherein "the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8). Building on the socially spectral and this LatIndigenous framework, the domesticana gothic emphasizes the role of the spectral and monstrous as it pertains to outsider identities and forgotten histories within the Latina gothic. Finally, I recognize the work of Latina scholar Marlen Del Rios who locates domesticana in punk iterations by Latina artists to note how domesticana serves in variegated spaces of cultural production.

The domesticana gothic, as it pertains to representations of queer Chicana childhood, is indebted to theories of affect and spectrality, such as Gordon's work on ghostly matters and Jane Bennett's theories of enchantment. Gordon writes, "being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (8). Similarly, Jane Bennett confronts our detachment from experiencing enchantment, wonder, or magic in everyday life. She claims that we align ourselves with the "tale of disenchantment," a narrative that depicts "the modern self as predisposed toward rationalism, skepticism" all while viewing nonhuman matter as "more or less inert "matter" (7). In this view, there is either no enchantment because we never had it, or enchantment is scant, existing only in divine spaces. Modernity is

characterized by a loss of enchantment, and Bennett suggests that we see enchantment in our everyday life instead of absence. Bennett and Gordon encourage an affective approach to the unseen but felt; while Bennett emphasizes the unseen in everyday life in order to recognize magic, Avery Gordon examines ethnic fictions to reckon with the ghostly to process trauma. I extend Bennett and Gordon's affective approaches as the domesticana gothic recognizes the enchantment of the everyday youth experience, noting moments of speculation in daily life within a racist, patriarchal, queerphobic world. Furthermore, the domesticana gothic supplies a counter vision that rejects the Cartesian split and tales of disenchantment, utilizing mixtures of magic, terror, and horror to show us society's living ghosts. Gordon and Bennett's theorizations shape the domesticana gothic through their focus on affect, spectrality, and enchantment that affords the magical a space within the Latina gothic.

Beast Meridian: (Literary) Bodies in Time/Space

Beast Meridian is a poetry collection that recounts the experiences of an unnamed Mexican American daughter of immigrants and her mental health struggles as she navigates grief, sexism, assimilation, and queerphobia. Mirroring the fragmented nature of trauma, the collection is split into three parts: "An Illness of Pines" which depicts the life of a Chicana in Texas; "A Halo of Beasts," which traces the Chicana's migrant family history; and "The Way Back," a story of a young girl's exile in fairytale verse. In the collection, the domesticana gothic manifests through the ghostly and socially spectral, defying normative generic borders of the bildungsroman. The indeterminacy of Chicana girlhood is evident in how the bildungsroman genre in the collection uses ghosts,

monsters, and the socially spectral to call attention to loud silences and marginalization. The epigraph alludes to indeterminacy, quoting Gloria Anzaldúa as she refers to the in-between spaces, or “the place/space (nepantla) where realities interact and imaginative shifts happen” (35). The imaginative shifts that nepantla evokes foreshadows the liminality and indeterminacy that Villarreal depicts. In Villarreal’s collection, childhood is the place of ambiguity filled with potential and anxiety simultaneously in which ghosts and monsters surface. The indeterminacy of it reveals complicated futures inseparable from their unsettling past.

Ghosts, as a manifestation of the domesticana gothic, appear in the nebulous space/time in the poem “Dissociative States.” “Dissociative States,” presents a young Chicana’s tumultuous home life after losing her grandmother from cancer while she witnesses her uncle’s alcoholism and grapples with her mother’s own dissociation. The poem is placed in the first section of the collection titled “An Illness of Pines,” and it is divided into three separate sections that are connected by numbers starting from 1 to 50. Ironically, despite the chronological numbering, the poem contains a temporal disorder that reflects the speaker’s state of disassociation. The term “dissociative” is typically linked to psychology and referred to in association with dissociative disorders which are disorders where a person, as a result of stressful life events, loses connection between memories, identity, thoughts, and surroundings. The poem prioritizes feelings, the unseen, as well as psychic trauma, which juxtaposes scientific notions that a psychological diagnosis would entail. Villarreal’s numbers 1 to 50 signal stages or states of dissociation which focalizes the many ways dissociation is felt. An anachronistic

timeline of the speaker's experiences emphasizes the unclear split from past, present, and future, indicating a liminal space wherein healing may potentially occur.

The disjointed structure of "Dissociative States" envisions a *Domesticana* gothic temporality as it opens spaces to consider the socially spectral while primarily taking place within the home life of the Chicana. *Dissociative States* 1 through 10 follows a young girl listening in on a phone call between a doctor and her father. The doctor explains that the experimental treatment the grandmother had undergone has failed and resulted in her passing. *Dissociative state* 4 shows two empty brackets, implying a psychological break as she recalls in the 5th dissociative state "I can't piece together any memory after" (Villarreal 25). In the 11th dissociative state, the speaker discusses her uncle's alcoholism which is presented as a coping mechanism developed as a result of accumulated loss. The speaker uses spectral imagery to convey how she is haunted by loss, how it has accumulated in the body: "we are in pain because our umbilical cords have grown back & roots / themselves to objects of vice" (25). The umbilical cords signal a constant pain in the past that binds and haunts the present and the future. The speaker adds that her umbilical cord is "a braid snaking out of [herself] 13 / to find its roots in the pines" (25). While snakes are typically associated with the Biblical serpent as sneaky and malicious, Gloria Anzaldúa's writings on the snake decolonize this association. For Anzaldúa, the serpent causes wounds and heals them as "the soul uses everything to further its own making" (68). The speaker's attachment to nature and her mission to "find its root in the pines" becomes an unraveling necessary to heal her future self (25). The *Domesticana* gothic is evidenced in the umbilical cord and root imagery evocative of

home wherein embodied pain represents the haunting of the past in the space of the present. Therefore, the haunted past manifests through the unruly nature of the cord that must navigate the trauma.

The Domesticana gothic calls upon the socially spectral through imagery of domesticity. When the speaker calls to someone for help in a time of need and grief, she summons the ghost of her grandmother as “the drawers in the room open / themselves 27 & floral skirts unfold / themselves” to find her grandmother’s form and familiar smell of “pibil & bitter orange fabuloso” (26). The heightened sensorial experience of hearing the drawers open, watching the clothes unfold, and smelling the pibil and bitter orange fabuloso makes tangible the nostalgic, cultural connection initiated by the ghost in this moment of enchantment. The domesticity of the haunting, showcased through the domestic objects and the domestic sphere, reveals how hauntings occur in the space of the quotidian which, in turn, places enchantment in the disenchanted. Moreover, rather than creating a terrifying domestic space like in female gothic texts such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the poem enchants via the spectral and gothic to create a magical, familial space that honors memory. Therefore, the poem invites the enchanted spectral into spaces of loss to show what is grieved and honored. In describing the ghost as a sign of haunting, Gordon notes how “being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (8). The ghost of her grandmother guides the speaker, transporting her back to the past when the speaker is ten years-old, reminding her of a time where she did not

understand the ramifications of her grandmother's cancer. Upon being here, the speaker realizes how unaware she was of her grandmother's aggressive cancer as "chestnut hairs / felled silent from [her] head" (26). The temporal shift signals how the grandmother's suffering happened in silence which indicates how suffering goes unseen and unnoticed even as it wears down the body— it was not until death that the grandmother's suffering took on ghostly shape which invited the speaker to act as witness. The final section of the poem ends with the speaker holding space for this new knowledge as she states, "this is how I can go on, knowing you have returned home" (27). In the final section of the poem, the liminal space that the Domesticana gothic holds by way of haunting creates a ghostly "home" that the grandmother can figuratively return to by passing on her story. The speaker can hold space for the suffering the grandmother endured, and the return home illustrates how disjointed memories assist the process. The Domesticana gothic urges the remembrance of the past which encourages us to linger in being haunted in order to offer moments of connection for the Chicana to heal from generational trauma.

While the Domesticana gothic manifests in the figures of ghosts and liminal spectral space in "Dissociative States," the Domesticana gothic, in the poem "Assimilation Rooms" surfaces through horror tropes such as the boogeyman and claustrophobia in the first part of the poem to reveal the process of marginalization that whiteness constructs in spaces such as the home, the U.S. public education classroom, and the workplace. Villarreal's poem "Assimilation Rooms" uses the monster-figure as vehicle for exploring the anxiety that comes with assimilation, and the poem's form

further illuminates the anxiety the monster embodies through the page's use of blank space and block format.

The poem depicts a young Chicana's journey with assimilation as she enters school and goes into the workforce; moreover, she reflects on the violent erasure and othering that assimilation carries out, demonstrating the haunting that public institutions have on cultural identity and ancestral knowledge. What is felt and unseen manifests into ghosts and monsters one faces daily. School represents an "assimilation room" where the speaker must reject her cultural identity and become "Americanized," and the block format of the poem represents the containment assimilation creates. The first room presented is the *cuartito*, or little room, she shares with her grandmother where "*juntas veíamos novelas y rezábamos hincadas*" (Villarreal 30). The little room depicts a safe, cherished space presented in Spanish, the speaker's first language that she uses with family members. The Spanish language instills a sense of safety in the first section of the poem because of its familial ties. The abrupt code-switching in bold English language words occurs at the tail-end of the poem to dramatize the violence of the classroom. Within the classroom space, the speaker becomes the monstrous, the illegible, and excessive, and she expresses her fears by code-switching between Spanish and English:

[...] los niños se burlaban que allí estaba **with the boogey**
man y me atrancaron la puerta y solo escribo esto
para rogarte que por favor ábreme la puerta porque
tengo mucho miedo y esta oscuro y todavía estoy aquí
adentro con él (Villarreal 30)

The boogeyman is the one of four instances in the poem where the Spanish breaks, and the speaker code-switches, emphasizing a linguistic displacement and dislocation. It is important to note that the speaker uses the white, Western reiteration of the boogeyman rather than the Latinx version of El Cucuy, for example. In discussing the boogeyman's contemporary usage in suburban America during the rise of the working parent household, Daniel Harris writes that "the boogeyman fears are also related to the rise of youth culture and our discomfort with our children's newfound autonomy" (100). The usage of the monster's English name unveils the monstrosity of whiteness. The boogeyman signifies a threat to a child's attempt at autonomy, and the English marker of his name enforces assimilation. Thus, the boogeyman's act of violence becomes racialized linguistic violence—he is taking her autonomy and cultural identity.

Moreover, the boogeyman is the threat that the white children use to enclose the speaker and trap her; in turn, the speaker internalizes the monster, and the monster is maintained by her fear of how the white children will perceive her as illegible. Later, the speaker notes how she later feels that "nothing an immigrant's / daughter does

is intelligible" (35). The pauses signify how deeply embedded this belief is in her now. In discussing gothic monsters, Jack Halberstam writes that "the monster itself is an economic form in that it condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body" which determines "many answers to the question of who must be removed from the community at large" (3). The boogeyman gives notice to the displacement and loss of agency experienced by the speaker. To the speaker, the monsters are the boogeyman and the children who terrorize her and make her illegible.

To the white children, the speaker is the monster, or the Other, but they are disgusted by her, not afraid of her. Eventually, she becomes the monster to herself via her perceived illegible self, and the disgust the children feel for her is shared by the teachers in the other Assimilation Rooms.

The *Domesticana* gothic also emerges on the space of the page through an assemblage of footnotes that embody the act of monster-making and negotiating voice. The poem contains translated footnotes in English which is the language that the kids use to taunt the speaker. Citing Gerard Genette in a study on footnotes and paratext in Latinx literature, Ellen McCracken writes how the footnote is traditionally viewed as paratext or “the material surrounding a text” (40). However, McCracken notes that authors like Sandra Cisneros utilize the footnote in ways that include “carry[ing] on the performative strategies and themes of the primary text” as well as blurring the lines between history and fiction in a playful manner, respectively (40). In this case, Villarreal deploys translation and the footnote to enact a haunting voice that you hear doubly pronounced as the pace and childlike perspective of both languages remains the same. For instance, the lack of punctuation mirrors a distressed child’s long-winded speech while telling a story as the speaker says, “I was in there with the boogeyman and so they lock the food lock me in and I just write to beg you to please open the door” (translated by Villarreal 30). The childlike voice haunts the footnotes when she begs to be let out, and thus, Villarreal’s speaker exists in both the text and paratext. The children’s attempt to exclude what is not “American” pushes the speaker into the margins with a monster, creating monsters to taunt her while making her a monster, too. In their othering of her,

the children create the monstrosity of marginalization to erase her Mexican, bilingual cultural background. Orquidea Morales, in her study of Gloria Anzaldúa engagements with the monstrous, writes that “for Chicanas, the monstrous identity is inherently linked to breaking of a social/cultural gender norm” (4). Anxiety stems from the assimilation that rendered the girl’s body excessive and invisible. The speaker’s exclusion is when she becomes monstrous and ghostly, noticeably othered, absent, and locked away. Avery F. Gordon discusses the cajoling nature of the ghost in ethnic U.S. literature, arguing that the ghost’s presence “eludes us as often as it makes us look for it” (6). The cajoling in the young girl’s experience as she moves through the assimilation rooms reveals the structures of white supremacy that efface the girl. The *Domesticana* gothic materializes exclusion by way of paratext, specifically footnotes, to view negative space on the page as an expression of the Chicana’s monstrous identity.

The monstrous locates the harm of patriarchal structures and finds connection with other girls going through similar situations. The speaker of “Gulf Pines, or Final Assimilation Room” depicts the young girl from the “Assimilation Rooms” in the “Final Assimilation Room” which is a mental hospital. The speaker responds to the othering by removing the true illness from her wounded body:

The girl doubledbled shares a heart with the / pines pulls the vein from the blade
antlered / illness made create punished into / deformity suspended mid-run an
animal / body’s instinct is to survive pain and flee its / hunter the girl attached to
the thrashing / creature is calm, nearly smiling another / another another is us in a
hospital room (Villarreal 37)

Through a reference to Frida Kahlo's "The Wounded Deer," the speaker "pulls the vein from the blade / antlered illness" and identifies it as the cause of pain. She acknowledges that the hybrid creature's difference (seen in her form) is not what is monstrous—the true monsters are those who hunt her as well as the pervasive, oppressive structures that bind her body "in trouble"; after all, she is only deemed abnormal because of those who construct the assimilation rooms' normative bodies (Villarreal 37). Rather than pathologizing the creature, the speaker empathizes, stating that it is "an animal body's instinct" to "survive pain / and flee its hunter" (37). Thus, the Domesticana gothic challenges definitions of the monstrous to unravel the structural poisons that construct bodies into monsters, recognizing that "another / another another / of us / in a hospital room" exist, "nearly smiling" in the face of it all, like Kahlo's "Wounded Deer" and her smile (37). There is an appreciation for knowledge that is felt through the body. In addition, life and death blend to reveal living death.

I extend that the Domesticana gothic blurs the line that separates life and death to bring attention to the conditions of a living death; this is done in order to reveal underlying structures that pathologize the body. In Villareal's poem "Girlbody Gift," the eleven year-old speaker dresses against the feminine ideals of Anglo and Chicano culture. She "iron[s] papi's khakis / a dickies crease with white t-shirt / gel-comb black / slickback como linda" (28). Dressing in her father's clothing, her father feels entitled to violence against her body especially when she is performing outside her designated role as signified by his very physical attempt to redirect his daughter. The father's "hand crush [her] neck" and he threatens the speaker with, "si no te compones / te voy a matar /

aqui no quiero jotas,” or “if you don’t fix yourself / I will kill you / I don’t want jotas here” (28). Under the coloniality of gender, the speaker’s gender expression and sexuality are policed by her father and met with the threat of violence. The coloniality of gender exists within the private sphere, and it is exacerbated in the public. In a critique of Aníbal Quijano’s understanding of the coloniality of gender, Maria Lugones argues that Quijano is conceptualizing the coloniality of gender too narrowly for its realistic and material qualities. Quijano defines the coloniality of gender as a logic based on power over “sex, its resources, and products” (qtd in Lugones 5). To Lugones, this characterization is too narrow as it only considers the coloniality of gender on the basis of sex, a view that lacks consideration for societal implications of gender that are classed and racialized. Thus, colonization constructs gender in a way that values white womanhood and femininity. Lugones writes:

Only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates. There were also understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense of “without gender,” sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. (13)

The coloniality of gender can be seen by the father’s controlling hand and words to the speaker who is expressing a queerness that is perceived by the father as deviant. To add, in "Assimilation Rooms," the speaker in the third assimilation room is in a gendered assimilation room: gym class; furthermore, gym class is an assimilation room where the

coloniality of gender and race appear. She notices “whitegirl nipples / soft & pink” and desires them over her own “dark” ones (Villareal 32) which can be seen as internalizing that only whiteness can embody an ideal femininity where the brown body, in contrast, cannot be ideal or desired, especially not by another girl. This notion is corporeal and internalized in her mind through notions of beauty as she learns to devalue her own body as a queer girl of color. The poem “Girlbody Gift” ends with a hospital scene wherein her roommates engage in sexual experiences with one another. The community seems unengaged with the normative expectations of heterosexuality despite the hospital setting, which according to Michel Foucault, actively works to categorize and create bodies, particularly those labeled deviant versus constructions of normal. This is represented by the poem’s doctor who is tasked with defining women’s sexuality based on exclusive heterosexual definitions of sexuality. The poem states how despite the allusions to lesbian sexual experiences, the doctors negate this sexual experience and instead “doctor / writes hymen intact.” The sign of sexual experience is constructed around a heterosexual notion that true sexual experience only exists within heterosexuality.

Playful Storytelling in Gurba’s *Painting their Portraits in Winter*

Similar to Villareal’s poetry collection, Myriam Gurba’s short story collection *Some Abuelitas Keep Their Chicana Granddaughters Still While Painting Their Portraits in Winter* explores Chicana authorship and the anxieties of childhood, using ghosts and motherhood to explore narrators who are ambiguously alive or dead, at the very least socially spectral, signaling towards a Domesticana gothic. The collection follows a young, queer protagonist between her home in the U.S. and her extended family relations

in Mexico, starting with the title story in which the protagonist's grandmother tells the protagonist and her sister spooky, terrifying stories about the Mexican town in order to get the girls to sit still while painting their portraits. Other members of the young protagonist's family such as her grandfather become the central figures of fairy-tale-esque stories, and ghosts become the main characters, too. Melancholic and comedic tones dominate the collection, reminiscent of ghost story and familial *cuentos*. A mixture of these tones create room for a playfulness between dark themes such as the examination of the containment motherhood conjures for young girls anticipating adulthood and exploring their queerness. In an interview with *The Normal School*, Gurba refers to the importance of storytellers in her family, pointing to the necessity of playfulness within these acts of storytelling: "one of the fun parts [...] is that [the elders will] each have their own version of a story, and then another will contradict her, and say, "No, you got it wrong, here's the real version of the story," and that will provoke a new story, and you could be there for hours fully entertained by storytelling" (2015). The storytelling "tends to be really melodramatic, kind of spooky, but also funny" (Gurba 2015). The playfulness of storytelling permeates the collection as it grapples with morbid topics like infanticide, ghosts, girlhood, queer death, and machismo, resulting in a gothic style of writing wherein life/death and humor/horror are intertwined. Humor is also an element Amalia Mesa-Bains identifies within the "domesticana" as an outlet that measures the paradoxical nature of the domestic sphere for the Chicana. The helix of humor/horror momentarily allows us to be unsettled in discomfort, to find a form of release. However, the collection does not seek to do away with discomfort; instead, it seeks to sit with it.

Gurba's stories assert that horror and comedy indeed belong in the same space and that discomfort is necessary in order to process girlhood; laughter for Gurba, then, is in spite of and in the face of discomfort.

Rather than supporting a binaristic construction of life then death, monstrous and ghostly bodies are, in turn, sites of valued embodied knowledges for the Domesticana gothic. Gurba's short story "Petra Páramo," a feminized riff of the popular title *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo wherein live and dead characters are difficult to distinguish, uses the ghost figure to queer the logic of life/death while emphasizing the dark, comedic nature of mundane life. In the text, an unnamed ghost girl goes on a journey to figure out who she was before death. Gurba uses comedy to evoke smiles or laughter in the face of struggle, challenging the notion that death is a medical end; instead, death becomes an entry point toward interrogating normative lines and laughing at their arbitrariness. Embracing speaking from the dead, the protagonist of this ghost story is a ghost born a ghost in search of finding out who she was in life. She repeats the following:

All I know, the ghost ruminated as she traced the hole where an umbilical cord had once tied her to someone, is that I'm dead. I'm a girl. And that the best things to come out of México came out of Jalisco. Mariachi. Trumpets blared in her head. Tequila. Alcohol poured into an imaginary glass. [...] Did I even make it to my quinceañera? (85)

What is highlighted here are images of a prior supposed life of Jalisco that relies on an imagined national pride specified through the noise of mariachi trumpets and the taste of

tequila. These sensory telltales are what the ghost girl presumes as the infantile connection via the umbilical cord. The event of a possible *quinceañera*, a rite of passage for fifteen year-old Mexican and Mexican-American girls, is established as a pivotal mark of Mexican girlhood. This is the ghost girl's unconfirmed but imagined previous life, and in doing so, Gurba disrupts our common notions about ghosts—that ghosts are no longer in tune with their senses, that they live first then die, and that they have knowledge about the world they lived in. As Sharon Patricia Holland notes, “embracing the subjectivity of death allows marginalized peoples to speak about the unspoken” (2000). Instead, the ghost girl creates a story and connects it to her umbilical cord much like Villarreal's “Dissociative States.” When the story's protagonist is introduced, she is a young, hopeful ghost hungry for answers and seeking to expand her knowledge.

The story's ghost girl defies the gothic trope of the ghost to demonstrate what Tanya González refers to as death's potential or “the (gothic) gift of death,” I argue, via the reverse bildungsroman (50). In a discussion of ghost stories, Robin Roberts argues that female ghost stories are about authorship and agency: “As she writes her own life, the female ghost creates a sort of reverse *kunstlerroman*, in that after death she grows and develops her authorial skills” (7). In turn, “Petra Páramo becomes a reverse bildungsroman, providing the ghost girl an opportunity in death to write her story. The reversal of the coming-of-age genre undoes the notion that to know oneself follows a strictly linear format as seen by ideas such as the Eurocentric “Hero's Journey.” Instead, to understand herself, the narrator starts with the end of her life. The person seeking knowledge is an unlikely explorer, and she is selective about the knowledge she attains.

Her quest for knowledge, to use Villarreal's terminology, occurs outside of "assimilation rooms" since:

The ghost sort of knew that if she wanted to learn anything about her origins, how she died, or how to program a VCR, she'd had to leave the Christmas-scented place. [...] The ghost decided *If I'm going to leave the forest and search for knowledge, I'm doing so with my own dead feet.* (Gurba 86)

Her desire to know prompts her to seek alternative sources, crossing boundaries to where the living exist so that she can understand more. She is not only learning about the living to inform what her experience could have been, she also dispenses knowledge onto the recently deceased, acknowledging them as part of a new way of "living" or existing. After witnessing the young Catholic man's death, she becomes a teacher for a brief moment, teaching him how to be a ghost in this world where:

most things taste like nothing but people's thoughts are sort of our food. They have flavors. You can taste what living things are thinking and feeling, but they aren't normal flavors. Like something might taste like joy, but it won't taste like chicken. Well, it might taste a little like chicken. You can taste the weirdest stuff, like apathy, disgust, love, and procrastination. (Gurba 98)

The seeker and giver of knowledge in this story is a young girl ghost, and she places value on the knowledge that emotions can offer. Knowledge is attained through taste, a bodily sense, from an appetite for wisdom and reliability. Her body is later revealed to be

born ghost—a ghost born a ghost. Sara Ahmed points to emotions like pain, disgust, and love for their significance in shaping bodies and actions. She writes that emotion “has been viewed as ‘beneath’ the faculties of thought and reason” since “emotions are associated with women, who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgment” (Ahmed 3).

By tasting thoughts and feelings, emotions are tied to appetite in death. Death has its own rules and ways of attaining information and prioritizing emotion; moreover, death is its own existence that one can live or can live beside, as evidenced when the Catholic man tells the girl ghost, “I’m going to go be with my death” (Gurba 98). An ability to return to death and to stay with death disrupts the colonial logic that separates life from death. Through the Catholic man, death is personified and specific as he wishes to be with his own death. At this time, the reader follows two dead subjects as this conversation filled with deep thinking, joking, and small talk happens; here, a literal sense of Holland’s subjectivity of death wherein death is a “site of familiarity” for marginalized people to speak from can be considered (2000). The pauses in her journey and few attained answers uncover the conditions of the subjectivities of death. The domesticana gothic ultimately rejects the colonial logic that condemns monstrous and ghostly bodies; instead, it attempts to understand them through alternative means. In doing so, bodily knowledge becomes central to this process, and as a result, a separation between life and death is rejected.

The domesticana gothic uses horror and the discomfort it produces as an access point to unsettle taken-for-granted notions of life and death. The young ghost's travels are hauntings dissimilar from the hauntings described in mainstream horror films until the end of the story when, in a horrifying yet comedic twist, a young boy becomes frightened by her appearance. The fright is not one way; instead, the two frighten each other—one with their ghostly appearance, the other with their terrifyingly inaccurate assumption. Neal Bell discusses the relationship between horror and humor, describing them as similar in structure due to their set-up and pay-off to relieve tension. The reader may laugh when the boy lumps all ghost girls into one "Anne Frank" category despite how the young ghost "just knew, she knew, knew, knew the same way that you know your gender and whether or not you're alive that she was not Anne Frank" (Gurba 120). The interaction filled with fright and laughter leads to deeper and more serious questions as the ghost girl figures out that no one else but this boy can see her—does she exist? Has she once existed? The story leads readers to these questions but also suspends their questioning of ghosts; in another line of the collection, the narrator warns readers that "ghosts don't need anybody to believe in them. They just are" (138). In the end, she decides to pause her earthly journey and continue it later. "Petra Páramo" ends in more questions than answers as readers are left to question if existence is mutually exclusive to humanity, or if we must move to untangle the two.

The domesticana gothic becomes a mode in which death is accessed to grapple with the containment that one's queerness encounters when living in patriarchal heterosexist environments by accessing specters of excess like La Llorona through stories

like “The Chaperones.” In “The Chaperones,” the teen protagonist confides in her high school teacher, Mrs. March, that she is lesbian; however, instead of receiving relatability, comfort, or validation from an older woman whose appearance, to the teen, evokes an albeit white queerness (“She had Virginia Woolf’s face, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s hair, and Walt Whitman’s wardrobe”), Mrs. March responds with a heteronormative reply that underpins a covert homophobic and transphobic definition of being a woman and of motherhood: “I’m fine with you being a lesbian but I feel sad that you might never have children” [...] In order to completely be, to completely be a woman, you must experience motherhood” (46). Mrs. March’s response posits that lesbianism and motherhood are two mutually exclusive spaces, negating the idea that lesbians could also experience motherhood while simultaneously positing a definition of womanhood that is based on biological determinism which is transphobic. The false “pity” that underlies the message leads the teen protagonist to believe she is like a “partial abortion” in the sense that she is “partially alive” which “slides [her] into the category of the living dead. [Her] maternal shortcomings render [her] a llorona” (47). The figure of La Llorona, which I will explore more in chapter two, becomes representative of the teen’s experience based on the “undoing” of motherhood they both commit via infanticide and lesbianism. To the teen girl navigating her sexuality, La Llorona’s mystique is that she is a mother and was a mother because “a mother is a mother is a mother even when she isn’t. Even when she never was” (48). The cutting of motherhood and her death is what brings La Llorona a voice as she is “louder dead than when her lungs breathed. She’s not completely gone but she’s not completely here either” (48). Spectrality, thus, renders voice and agency again,

and the living dead of La Llorona revives herself through the connected cases of infanticides that the Gurba cites, including Shaquan Duley, Susan Smith, and Andrea Yates. In relating the reality of motherhood under patriarchy, which, in the case of Andrea Yates, demonstrates the weaponization of religion against women as Yates was forced by her evangelical husband to keep having children despite being under emotional and mental duress, to being queer highlights the formation of an enclosure that constructs a socially spectral status for women and queer folks across borders. This enclosure is said to travel across borders as Gurba writes how La Llorona “leaves her passport on her nightstand when she travels. She wafts north into the United States to midwife her rebirth as an American.” (48). Here, La Llorona’s borderless spirit that possesses women to kill their children or become lesbians in this story demonstrates how the common interpretation of La Llorona’s tale, used as a warning to confine women and children, ignores the realities of the demonization and living dead status of women and queer folks. The teen girl realizes this in the story as she re-examines her coming out story to Mrs. March by relating it to how she learned about La Llorona and what the ghost means to her. In the next chapter, I will analyze how La Llorona is a spectral figure that represents a unique connection to death, expression, and outsider positionality.

Conclusion

The Domesticana gothic in *Beast Meridian* explores a dark, bodily intimacy against a colonial landscape. A Latina gothic that infuses magic illustrates the connectedness of life, darkness, death, and outsidership. We must consider works by

authors such as Ana Castillo, V. Castro, Silvia Moreno-García, Romina Garber, and Carribean Fragoza under the Domesticana gothic for they depict a gendered “struggle of flesh” through gothic retellings. *Beast Meridian* demonstrates the Domesticana gothic that centers this struggle internally and externally through its spacing on the page, line constraints, and rogue use of paratext. Childhood becomes a topic of anomaly and trouble in the public space, and this is furthered in the private. Monstrosity and spectrality become ways for Chicanas to query sexuality for authors like Myriam Gurba.

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La Llorona's Outsider and DIY Ethos

Like most children, I grew up hearing stories of frightful monsters with the intention that it would instill discipline and obedience. All my mother would have to do was mention “el Cucuy” to remind us how the boogeyman’s presence was constant—he was under the bed, lurking, waiting for us to be bad so the monster could drag us out of bed. However, my sister received a different frightful story. Since she could walk, my sister had a penchant for observing the world and getting lost in the fast moving crowds of a Walmart, the vast interiors of hospital floors, and the constant sameness of a suburb. Her desire to wander, and perhaps my mother’s fear that I would do the same, led my mother to tell us the tale of La Llorona. My mother instilled in her that La Llorona, after having lost her children in a mysterious drowning, was forever cursed to wander until she could retrieve them. If you wandered, she could capture you. I recall feeling a mixture of sadness and fear for La Llorona. All at once, she lost her children and was condemned to an afterlife of wandering where she could know no peace. In its feminization, wandering became feared. La Llorona’s curse to wander was a reminder that we did not want to stray too far from home and be cursed the same way.

Interestingly, hearing the tale from my mother, an immigrant woman from Mexico, carried other connotations—she was integrated into my father’s family in a new, strange country, and she had little to no contact with her mother or sisters because she now belonged to my father, a story similar to Cleofila’s in Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek” that is not uncommon in transnational Latinx families. For years, my paternal grandfather forbade my mother from learning to drive because it would “give her wings,”

and she was prohibited from pursuing education or holding a job even when our family needed the extra income. Captivity shaped her life, but in my mother's retelling of La Llorona, existing in the margins and the punishment that renders integration into society as no longer possible is the cautionary tale. If we did what we were told, we would be in the clear. My mother later revised her warnings; as we got older, she cautioned her daughters not to have children or marry young, because in her experience, these situations created the conditions for patriarchal captivity. These new warnings caused me to revisit La Llorona as a gothic horror symbol of emotional excess that refuses captivity. La Llorona's existence in the margins, lingering specter, and sticky grief makes her a fearsome, lonely outsider that Latina writers, artists, and poets engage and reimagine in their art to examine racial and gender-based violence. Using my term "Domesticana gothic," I assert that we study La Llorona's spectral qualities through the work of Latina artists that examine the excessiveness of the ghost alongside alternative modes of healing in order to process interpersonal and system harm committed against communities of color and femme people. In turn, the residue that hauntings posit—the felt, unseen, and emotional excess—becomes an area of possibility for Latinas.

In this chapter, I examine how Latina authors and artists continue to use La Llorona in feminist storytelling as an active specter within a landscape that writes her death as silence; instead, death becomes potential for a space of healing. Thus, I analyze La Llorona's spectrality in visual and narrative storytelling in relation to gothic horror as well as to Gloria Anzaldúa's *susto*, or fright. I revisit La Llorona and her haunting specter as I read her as a gothic horror symbol in order to deconstruct the *susto* her tale creates

and why her terrifying wailing has evoked a sense of liberation in a Latina feminist context. A review of goth and postpunk Latinx histories and a reading of Chicana artist Tina Hernández, Chicana band Fea, Chicana zinemaker R. Artemisa, Xicana-Chapina writer Rio de la Luz, and Chicana writer V. Castro illustrates how artists and authors link the ghost to a collective, matrilineal trauma whose grief, sadness, fear, and autonomy via her outsider identity and haunting becomes a source of agency and healing. Misfit outsider subcultures and crafting altars are modes of healing from which Latina and Chicana artists and writers access via this figure of La Llorona and her fearsome outsidership.

La Llorona's Origins and Scholarship

The legend of La Llorona is a ghost tale from Mexico that has been passed down orally for generations. The story has morphed into various versions, but it typically contains the following: a woman, scorned by her lover, loses her children by drowning and kills herself; ultimately, she is cursed to retrieve the souls of her lost children as a ghost that wanders the rivers. The way her children die vary as Orquidea Morales notes that her mother's retelling includes an accidental death. When I asked my father about the children's death, his mother told him that the children died in a house fire (also by accident) while my mother's retelling included a drowning by accident. Other times, La Llorona commits infanticide, creating a lack of empathy in this version of the retelling. To understand La Llorona's haunting, I suggest reading her through the Domesticana Gothic. In doing so, we gain new perspectives that connect La Llorona to subcultures, DIY ethos, queerness, and horror. Reading her as fearsome *rasquache* can allow us to

engage in dynamic readings of her evolving tale and witness how she is continuously accessed by Latina artists and writers.

Viewing La Llorona as a symbol that exists within popular culture and religion is necessary to see how she functions under marianismo and everyday life as she haunts the Latinx cultural imaginary. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Domino Renee Perez, Luis D. Leon, Sarah De Los Santos Upton and Leandra Hinojosa Hernández map the figure within Latinx communities across Mexico and the United States. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa places La Llorona as one of the three mothers of Latinx culture alongside La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche for the influence their constructed narratives have on Latina life. Taking a religious studies approach, Luis D. Leon queries La Llorona's position opposite to La Virgen de Guadalupe's in order to trace how various belief systems were transformed and redefined by devotees across the borderlands since "La Llorona is a transnational symbol who thrives and is reproduced in several types of movements" (7-8). In an exhaustive study of La Llorona's transnational representations in popular culture and varied media, Domino Renee Perez's *There was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* maps representations of the ghost by Latinx artists, writers, poets, musicians, film and television advertisements that range from re-interpretations to remixes and reinventions. Brenda Selena Lara identifies La Llorona within the same status as La Virgen and La Ciguanaba, stating that these folkloric icons "act as transnational symbols and knowledge towards framing Indigenous and Latinx social violence and epistemic hauntings" (92). For Latina feminist literature and cultural production, La Llorona haunts the critical imaginary, and her reiterations index a blend of

gothic, horror, and punk aesthetics that effuse rasquache sensibilities of “making do” within the haunted domestic space.

Stereotypical readings of La Llorona flatten her, but scholars that I build on seek to defy these readings and highlight the ghost story’s hauntings alongside current racial, sociopolitical, sexual, and reproductive violence. To combat stereotypical readings of La Llorona and highlight the true horrors that the ghost vocalizes, Sarah De Los Santos Upton and Leandra Hinojosa Hernández read the ghost as a reproductive justice symbol, arguing that “rather than serving as an example of malevolent motherhood, La Llorona is a mother figure who understands pain and loss and is therefore needed more than ever in a moment where BIPOC mothers are mourning the loss of children taken from them unjustly” (23). De Los Santos Upton and Hinojosa opt to revise the common, vilifying depiction of La Llorona since “all too often is the history of Mexicanas patriarchally and misogynistically written by white men (Heidenreich, 2020)” and thus, results in the erasure of current issues of immigration and violence against women-identifying people and birthing people (28). Viewing La Llorona’s pain as a collective pain, opens critical vistas for understanding La Llorona as a figure representative of colonial trauma whose uncontrollable wailing is a cry everyone hears yet chooses to ignore. Her haunting presence is felt and her cries are heard at night when it’s quiet yet people choose to move on and vilify her excessive crying, even blaming her for losing her children. I argue that the Domesticana gothic manifests through La Llorona as what Avery Gordon refers to as a socially spectral symbol we should read as gothic horror because in doing so, one can gain a new perspective to death. For Latinas and Chicanas, death becomes a place where

she is most vocal, where we can no longer ignore her cries against systemic violence. In analyzing pain's sociality, Sara Ahmed writes, "while the experience of pain may be solitary, it is never private" since "the impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs" (29-30). The scholarship on La Llorona's position as a grieving mother in addition to her spectrality is central to unpacking her as a figure that is haunted and that haunts.

Most recently, scholars such as Cathryn Merla-Watson and Orquidea Morales assert the investigation of renditions of La Llorona through a gothic and horror lens, respectively. Cathryn Merla-Watson's essay on Sandra Cisneros' "Woman Hollering Creek," posits how La Llorona's specter haunts the life of Cleofilas, a survivor of domestic abuse. Merla Watson's and Leon's similar focus on La Llorona's geographical mobility is one that I expand upon. In contrast to the gothic readings of La Llorona, Orquidea Morales traces the representation of La Llorona in horror films, particularly the slasher, exploring the virgin/whore dichotomy. In building on Merla-Watson and Morales, I argue for reading La Llorona through a blend of gothic horror. Similarly, when examining folklore and fiction in literature by Black women, Kinitra D. Brooks argues for "fluid fiction" which accounts for the slippages of genre. Influenced by Brooks' approach, the *Domesticana* gothic recognizes the blend of gothic, horror, folklore, and magic without calling the blend "magical realism" as this label forecloses other possible interpretations. Brooks discusses a similar homogenization that occurs when black women writers and performers are influenced by African cosmologies and epistemologies. Like Latinx speculative fiction, black women's supernatural literature is

misread as a homogenized magical realism which, Brooks suggests, ignores a long tradition of oral history that discusses the supernatural. I build from Brooks who calls this homogenization lazy and ahistorical, naming the blend of African-influenced folklore with horror, fantasy, and sci-fi as folkloric horror. I argue for a reading of La Llorona through a gothic and folkloric horror lens that engages with magic and ghostly without homogenizing the oral storytelling as “magical realism,” or, what I term the Domesticana gothic, in order to open a reading that invites hauntings as a necessary part of exploring *susto* through La Llorona.

As previously stated, this chapter reassesses La Llorona as a symbol of collective haunting that is transnational and shifts across time. In *Mythologies*, his work on symbols and culture, Roland Barthes discusses the symbol as part of three imaginations of the sign, expanding from how we read signs. For Barthes, the profound (symbolic) imagination rests on biographical or historical criticism while the formal (paradigmatic) imagination focuses on variation of imaginative and recurrent elements (217). Finally, the functional (or syntagmatic) imagination “nourishes [...] all those works whose fabrication, by arrangement of discontinuous and mobile elements, constitute the spectacle itself” (Barthes 217). Thus, the syntagmatic imagination “no longer sees the sign in its perspective, it *foresees* it in its extension: its antecedent or consequent links, the bridges it extends to other signs” (217). I place La Llorona in Latina expression within a syntagmatic imagination as Latina artists and writers foresee the ghost’s fearsome shape, mobility, and outsider identity to challenge misogynist readings, leading to ask “what if...”; as a result, cultural producers are transported to the lives and answers

that may already exist as they utilize creative methods to interpret these speculative moments through cultural hauntings. Kathleen Brogan points to how:

ghosts in contemporary American ethnic literature [...] recreate ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present. In doing so, these works have much to tell us about our own historical moment and the range of imaginative responses it provokes. (4).

For Brogan, stories of cultural hauntings “[bring] to the foreground the communal nature of its ghosts” which I apply to how La Llorona signifies a collective haunting. Brogan also calls the ghost a metaphor as “go-between, an enigmatic transitional figure moving between past and present, death and life, one culture and another” (6). However, she is this and more than that. While La Llorona is a cross-cultural ghost whose mobility mars and troubles Western notions of temporality and geography, I argue that she is more than a “go-between” metaphor. Viewing her as a symbol for collective haunting enables us to see the ghost as her own. Thus, readings that emphasize La Llorona’s weeping outside of the typical reiterations of her tale must be examined. What does her weeping look like over time, and what does its proximity to wailing suggest? Does her wailing out of sadness turn into frustration, anger, and grief? Furthermore, in Roland Barthes’ discussion of the authority of an author to a text, Barthes writes that “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). There is no official author of La Llorona and not having an authorship has invited Latinas and Chicanas to retell and remix her tale against popular misogynist

readings of it used to advance a sexist agenda. These retellings are challenged by Latina and Chicana writers and artists who emphasize La Llorona's spectral qualities along with her fearsome nature and pain. Barthes adds, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). The power of not having an author allows for Latinas and Chicanas to take back the figure of La Llorona. As a Chicana who grew up hearing the tale, I follow the trace of the weeping woman's narrative as it has been translated and crossed borders, enduring various apocalyptic events, catastrophes, and racial and sexual violences against her children.

Bad Women, Good Girls: Our Bodies and the Land

I approach the ghost story of La Llorona as both a story to scare children into obedience and as a mechanism of control to keep women in line with the expectations of Marianismo. Marianismo, according to Alicia Nuñez, MPH et. al, is defined as:

The counterpart to machismo is marianismo, which is a set of values and expectations concerning female gender roles [emphasizing] the role of women as family- and home-centered; it encourages passivity, self-sacrifice, and chastity [depicting] women in nurturing roles and prescribe[ing] respect for patriarchal values. [It] is rooted in Christian values brought to Latin America during colonization [...] a construction of the expected female gender roles based on the Virgin Mary [This] cultural script [...] may be associated with health outcomes [...], including less emotional well-being (Murguía, 2001) and increased negative emotions, particularly with regard to higher depression symptoms (Cano, 2003; Piña-Watson, Castillo, Ojeda, & Rodríguez, 2013). (3-4).

Marianismo seeks to uphold patriarchal gender roles that resulted from colonialism as machismo and marianismo are intertwined (Nuñez et. al.))) In *Magical Realism: Essays on Music, Memory, Fantasy, and Borders*, Vanessa Angélica Villarreal creates an “Encyclopedia of All the Daughters I Couldn’t Be” scattered across essays to identify the control that marianismo seeks to maintain and how it is impossible to achieve. To be a “buen niña,” to Villarreal, becomes a warning. Villarreal writes how “this is the phrase you remember most from childhood: pórtate bien. Or, be good, said as a warning” (31). The warning of “being good” is doubled for Latinas living in the U.S. where one must also be a “good” or “grateful” immigrant (or, daughter of immigrants). When discussing Latinas, I recognize the diverse experiences we have with our material experiences and bodies as I discuss heteropatriarchal violence against queer girls, cisgendered women and girls, femmes, nonbinary folks, and trans-identifying women and girls; moreover, I reject biological determinism that conflates sex and gender and promotes essentialism.

La Llorona’s story, analyzed and reconceptualized through a domesticana gothic lens, reveals geographical, cultural hauntings marked by colonization. Alicia Gaspar de Alba discusses the relationship between women and the land that has been forged through myths like Manifest Destiny and Aztlán that rely on men as the active, dominating pioneers while the land is feminized as passive, “mother/womb/virgin” (117). The image utilized in both movements distills a biological determinist and sexist ideology that maintains the ideology of the “primitive virgin” and “conquered motherland”, respectively. By tying Aztlán to a myth similar to that of Manifest Destiny for how Chicanos see women, she highlights the function of the family. The Aztlán myth, within

the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s, prompted the family to be upheld by the “Apa” or patriarchal figure:

Only the laws of the Father govern Aztlan, though it is the Mother who is pictured over and over again as holding together the family, the house, and thus the culture. This imbues the mother figure with a biological mystique and a symbolic role as the beating heart of Aztlán. (116)

The myth of Aztlán makes women who are, according to Gaspar de Alba, “hocinas” or “loudmouthed” about the sexism and homophobia of Chicano men, suspect and not to be trusted. The familia, then, becomes a place of rigid gender roles where the Chicanas must endure the “Tres Marias Syndrome,” or the Chicano patriarchy’s designated roles for women which take root “in honor of the three Marys who were present at the Crucifixion of Jesus: The Virgin Mary; Mary, the Mother of James; and Mary Magdalene, the sister of Lazarus and reformed Whore” (116). I relate Gaspar de Alba’s work to [un]frame the bad woman, or to recognize how Tres Marias Syndrome and specific “racial, social, cultural, sexual, national/regional, historical, and religious discourses of identity” frame “brown female bodies,” to Patricia Hill Collins’ work that Black feminist thought seeks to do in challenging what she terms “controlling images” (116). The concept of “controlling images” examines how the U.S. deploys stereotypical portrayals of black women (specifically “mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mamas”) to “justify U.S. black women’s oppression” and “make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Collins 76). For Collins, controlling images like the mammy, matriarch, and the

welfare mother dismissed social injustices that mothers endured as it worked to uphold the cult of true womanhood, a white supremacist concept that maintained that “true” women (white women) “posse[ss] four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” while othering and objectifying women of color (79). In the same chapter, Collins discusses how U.S. Black women writers enact self-definition against the ongoing objectification that controlling images emits. Taking from Black feminist thought and techniques of unframing by decolonizing how we conceptualize women’s relationship to land and the body, La Llorona’s wanderings towards and away from the domestic sphere, into the water and onto roads via hauntings must be examined. These wanderings urge readers to view the beauty of destruction within death, spectrality, and water as La Llorona stands as a force associated with water toward an ecological reckoning.

La Llorona, as reconceptualized by Latina artists and writers through the use of gothic horror tropes, magic, and cosmology, challenge marianista expectations of women to be the passive, conquerable territory. Thus, I align myself with Gaspar de Alba who describes Chicanas as taking on an “embodied aesthetic,” one that “uses the body as a signifier for place [...] and a site of origin, bridge between worlds, and locus of liberation” (119). This vision of embodiment crosses the spectral, or the ghostly, whose presence is typically thought of as disembodied; however, John Jennings reminds us that “a ghost is just trauma with a shape” (252). Ghosts, like La Llorona, become louder but are also both mobile and immobile, and I am interested in what this might suggest about agency, enclosures, and expression.

La Llorona and the Misfits

The first episode of Netflix's *Wednesday* premiered November 23, 2022, marking a growing interest in horror and gothic themes as well as a rising consumerism in goth fashion and Latinx representation. Representation signals toward shared meanings within mass culture, and Stuart Hall defines mass culture for its “widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of ordinary people” (1). Hall’s definition of mass culture rejects the notion of what is “good” or “high brow” when it comes to culture and calls for meaning-making in diverse social groups. He writes how shared cultural meanings “organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (3). Netflix’s *Wednesday* adds to the Latinx representation of the Addams family, but the show’s limited discussion of *Wednesday*’s Mexican heritage as well as the erasure of indigenous peoples through the assignation of *Wednesday*’s white ancestor Goody Addams as a device that talks over the voices affected by settler colonialism hardly makes *Wednesday* a nuanced or elaborate form of representation. This chapter will not focus on *Wednesday* Addams nor make any claim about the character, but I use the example of her Netflix special to draw attention to the continued attachment of Latinx folks and the gothic, goth, and postpunk, even if loosely linked.

Catherine Spooner investigates the gothic within goth subcultures, defining Goth as a youth subculture that “derives its visual style and preoccupations from Gothic literature and cinematic tradition, which first emerged in Britain in the late 1970s, but

which, like many youth movements, spread quickly across the Atlantic and beyond” (94). For goth subculture, the gothic becomes a site of non-containment and excess; while the gothic seeks to contain, Spooner traces Dick Hebdige’s labeling of the Goth subculture as “spectacular” for its seeking “to enact symbolic resistance through a controversial and clearly recognizable visual style,” including other aspects such as music, film, and literature (94-6). *Wednesday* makes small and surface-level nods to Wednesday’s Mexican heritage, and it highlights a Romantic gothic aesthetic in its filming location of Romania and fashioning of Wednesday by Colleen Atwood that evokes a pilgrim colonial American nostalgia. Valli Herman, in her article “How Jenna Ortega’s Turning that ‘Wednesday’ Goth Vibe into Hot Fashion” (2023) published in the Los Angeles Times, writes that the fashion in the television show “reignited overlapping fashion aesthetics such as gothcore, dark academia, emo and punk.”

Noting the truncating of goth into a fashion aesthetic, web articles like those by Herman, Nina Metz, and Katerina Portela dub Wednesday a “goth” girl, tying her to goth and post-punk self-fashioning. Moreover, one of the first images of Wednesday’s nod to her Latinidad is that of the character in her dorm room while Chavela Vargas’s “La Llorona”, a rendition of the traditional song whose woe and sorrow, plays in the background, eliciting a mourning that feels goth while its spectral subject demonstrates a gothic matter. In addition, scholars like Catherine Spooner note how goth and girlhood merge into spaces such as the “whimsical macabre” which “reconfigures the gruesome and grotesque as playful, quirky and even cute, and often draws on imagery associated with childhood” dependent on “visual language incorporating fashion, costume, *mis-en-*

scene” (99). Spooner associates Burton with this particular style, and while *Wednesday* does fit into this “whimsical macabre,” the texts that I analyze do the opposite. Instead, the texts of Rios de la Luz and V. Castro utilize La Llorona as a way to embrace the ugly as a playful performance and point to the beautiful as the monstrous force enabling containment, yet one whose artifice is desired to survive, as later chapters will examine. Goth and misfit cultures and aesthetics, particularly their DIY methods and styling, become another artifice much like beauty but where “stripped down” and “ugly” feelings can be accessed.

Latinx interest and activity within goth and post-punk subcultures have been well-documented by Jim Mendiola, Richard T. Rodríguez, Cristina Herrera, Trevor Buffone, Eliza Rodríguez Gibson, and Marlen Rios-Hernández. Most recently, Katerina Portela identifies Jenna Ortega’s *Wednesday* as a mobilizing force in helping “expand a renewed interest in goth culture.” In her article “Lucha Libre and Leather: Latinos Rule the L.A. Goth Scene” Portela documents the presence of goth Latinx subculture in Los Angeles by highlighting events like Lucha Goth Haus, a luchador event which she describes as “a recurring variety show in which the iconic Mexican sport of lucha libre meets the sounds of dark wave and industrial music.” Moreover, LosGothsCo, a Los Angeles-based collective invested in all things Latinx and goth, have hosted events across the state of California, including major cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Riverside. These events are late night dances such as the GothiCumbia that blends sounds and rhythms of the cumbia musical genre with rock en español and dark wave music. Noting that this connection between goth and post-punk bands (particularly British post-punk)

and Latinx folks, Richard T. Rodríguez writes that these fan ties are not exclusive to California. On the self-fashioning Siouxsie Sioux-influenced makeup and clothing style taken on by Latina fans, Rodríguez illustrates how Latinas from New York and the Midwest adopt this sensibility as "Siouxsie's influence surfaces in Latinx expressive culture from varied geographic locations" (42). These connections between goth, emo, punk, and misfit scenes render attention to the creepy, spooky, and spectral aspects of myths and folklore including those like duendes, El Chamuco, Cihuateteo, and La Llorona.

Part of her "Self-Regeneration 2" series, photographer Tina Hernández (born in Brownsville, Texas) poses as La Llorona in "La Llorona Con su Corazón Encadenado" or "La Llorona with her Heart in Chains," depicting a goth rendition of La Llorona dressed in all black rather than the all-white attire she is known for. The self insert materializes as a manifestation of Latina Chicana reclamation of La Llorona's anger. Her eye makeup of black tears resembles goth and post-punk makeup styles as well as the religious Catholic icon of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, or Our Lady of Sorrows. La Llorona's tears are sorrowful and aggrieved as her eye sockets are visible to the viewer, making it feel like we are seeing into an empty rage as she rejects our gaze. She stares at us, but she boldly rejects our gaze. The "rejected" is rejecting us, chaining her heart close to her and not smiling to show how she is not welcoming the viewer in any way. The decaying foilage behind her is not inviting.



Figure 2: La Llorona con su Corazón Encadenado by Tina Hernández

Along with her gaze and the blending of goth and religious iconography, the disarray of leaves and painted wind in the background in all-black work to emphasize the turmoil of being “rechazada” or tossed aside, left behind, demonstrated through the chained heart. Chains, a symbol of rebellion in goth fashion style, work to symbolize the unwillingness to become rechazada again. Interestingly, the anatomically drawn heart stands out against the chains in the forefront, perhaps to show an alignment with the goth romance of putting hearts and emotions upfront in spite of the possibility of that pain happening again. In an artist statement, Tina Hernández asks, “How many La Lloronas exist today and why are they like that? In what ways does La Llorona represent mujeres or how are we like her? Why was she demonized in the first place? How are mujeres/women demonized today?” In doing so, she evokes a multiplicity of Lloronas—similar to the way that Myriam Gurba does in the previous chapter—across time and space, a group of women, or I would reach, to suggest a coven, much like in *Itza*.

Described by Blackheart Records as a San Antonio-based band that embodies “one of the most vital tenets of punk: total and unapologetic freedom, fearlessly expressed with both fury and joy,” Fea’s song “La Llorona” evokes the emotions of the rechazada through their song “La Llorona,” a first-person confessional pleading and grieving of a woman left with no choice.

Similar to Myriam Gurba's work on the weeping woman, Fea pushes that we cannot focus too much on *why* she did what she did or that it was bad and she needs to feel sorry.

The first verse, makes use of the active voice, as the ghost wails:

I was out of control and he was all I could see
I turned my back on my people just so he'd be with me
I waited for him and after all this time
He fell for someone else, he was no longer mine
I lost my mind

The active voice occurs as does her unraveling in contrast to the passive voice later used in the pre-chorus to illustrate the infanticide: "and now they're dead. And now they're both dead. Their little bodies are floating in the water." The second "And now they're both dead" perhaps signals a dissociation from her own suicide and is followed by the grieving of potential:

I could have stayed
I could have stayed
I took my life and now I'm left to wander here

Here, the active voice starts again and is followed by the chorus of the song uncovers a wailing "why," the same "mis hijos" that cover the stories told by parents and guardians retelling the scary story as a warning. The guitar riff in the background that starts the song lingers until the end, representing La Llorona's own lingering. As a woman *rechezada*, she also details the underlying colorism and classism when he leaves her for someone "like him," until she was left with a choice to end her life or have him end hers

by leaving her for another woman. The song has the ghost ask, “he thought he'd drop me and start a new family?” to which she unapologetically answers, “over my dead fucking body.” Like their name suggests, Fea illustrates the ugliness and messiness of La Llorona in the first person mode and punk musical styling that elicits the rage of La Llorona’s wailing—a wailing that is too often only presented as either only rage as a scorned lover or sorrow from a grieving mother. Here, she is both, and she wants to be heard.

Wandering Girls: Sin Vergüenza

Queer Chicana artist and self-identifying chillona (crybaby) Ree Artemisa uses retablo aesthetics, comic book style, guides, field logs, and fortune teller folding techniques in her zines to renarrate stories of La Llorona outside of her narrative frame in addition to illustrating types of witches, ghosts, and curandera remedies. In this section, I highlight her use of La Llorona in “Ghost Guide” and “All of Them Brujas” zines. I am interested in how Artemisa brings La Llorona into the arena of ghost and to the arena of the bruja because this is a pattern that later occurs in *Itza*. In addition, what does wandering mean to the retelling of La Llorona?

La Llorona is presented in “Ghost Guide” and “All of Them Brujas” zine in similar yet distinct variations that emphasize both her tendency to be “the haunted and haunter” (Lara 91). “Ghost Guide” categorizes variations of ghosts including but not limited to: spirit friend, bed sheet ghost, ghost of punk, night zombie, and La Llorona. Each page has a set “low down” to what and who this ghost is as well as a “you will

need” section for the reader. Handwritten and illustrated, the “you will need” section infuses humor in a typically fearful situation of warning a person of a ghost. In the guide, some ghosts are harmful and others are simply friendly. Set two ghosts after “ghost of punk,” La Llorona is illustrated elusively with a traditional shapeless ghost body whose scalloped bed sheet “legs” appear like tentacles; the middle of her chest holds a black heart, staining the cloak, and her head resembles both a calavera and a baby head as she says in a dialogue bubble “Gimmie your kids!.” Caricature-like, the ghost is described as the “star of the most well known Mexican ghost legends ever,” the tone of which establishes that it is a role she plays within a popular, well-circulated narrative. Stereotyped in this way, warnings of sleeping on time and avoiding her story are listed in the “You will Need” section. In contrast, La Llorona in “All of Them Brujas” is illustrated out of the stereotypical bedsheet ghost image and represented in mundane clothing. According to Raquel Romberg, brujos derive from “Latin America, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, where popular forms of Spiritism, Catholicism, and native forms of shamanism have developed” as a “generic term that may designate espiritistas (Spiritists), curanderos (folk healers), santeros (Santeria priests), and chamanes (shamans) who heal, cleanse, and exorcise people by means of herbal medicine, divination, spirit possession, and magic works. All of these spiritual therapies and techniques are encapsulated in the term “brujeria” (214). “All of Them Brujas” is a zine described as a “field log of brujas spotted in the wilderness” meant for “educational purposes only” as a cautionary warning for the reader to take the information seriously. La Llorona is set between “The Moth-Caller” and “The Seance Experts,” and instead of donning her typical white dress or the

bedsheets like in “Ghost Guide,” she wears a modern-day brown and black gingham dress with a peter pan collar and scalloped hem. The plants in her brown hair make her appear like she belongs to the woods, a resident. Her nails are painted red, and both her hands and face are blacked out in contrast to her purple-blue skin, demonstrating her crime. Instead of appearing fearsome, her stillness, covered countenance looking up, and exposed hands render her mundane. She is not playing her typical role, and it is significant to note that this same design is used in “Weepy,” R. Artemisa’s short comic.

However, I want to point to how this mundane image and kitschy ghost image described before work in tandem to highlight the spectral and monstrous performance of La Llorona. Scholar Raquel Romberg discusses her interactions with a Puerto Rican bruja Haydee, “La Bruja de Villas de Loiza,” noting how Haydee’s consumption of stereotypical witch images creates this “Halloween Bruja” that goes against what elitist academic spaces might expect of a bruja. Instead of embodying the “subversive” image of a bruja that is anti-capitalist, Romberg writes how Haydee, by wearing and consuming capitalist Halloween costume aesthetics of a witch, she challenges the assumption that brujas are detached from a colonial, capitalist society that has veiled, muddled, and erased histories of persecution of brujos (particularly Puerto Rican brujos). The stylization is something one would not expect for an “authentic” bruja, thus, there is an agency that “Halloween brujas” have in querying what this “authentic” expectation does. The fashioning of La Llorona as a bedsheet ghost with an infantile Dia De Muertos calavera reminiscent of a consumable ghost-monster compared to the mundane bruja of La Llorona works to recognize a similar impulse to Haydee.

R. Artemisa's "Weepy" points to the immobilization and mobilization of La Llorona as a woman "Sin vergüenza" along with the ghost story's implications for young girls, femmes, and nonbinary folks. The zine depicts the journey of young girls who sneak and wander away from home and into the wilderness while telling the infamous ghost story, eventually meeting La Llorona who is pictured using the same design from "All of Them Brujas." The retelling is not concerned with the plot of the tale which is covered in the first page with a long note detailing the story that is typically told with origins dating to Malinche and Coatlicue. Instead, the girls talk about how they emotionally relate to La Llorona and her story, taking her out of the plot that overwhelms who she once was. The panels begin in the bedroom, with frames ever-expanding to include flowers, ants, birds, and other natural living beings associated with the wilderness until hillside landscapes become the backdrop of their journey. The hillsides and dirt roads are void of humans but filled with butterflies, flowers, trees, and water, and the colorful vibrancy of these images contrast the spiders and gloomy skies all in one panel. The unnamed girl with the braids attributes her desire of La Llorona to the fact that "nothing seems to scare [La Llorona]" because she herself is scared "all the time" (Artemisa). Through the ghost, she expresses her desire to be scared, to know of the tale's tragedy, and in a way, relate. The girls discuss La Llorona's "bad woman" and "mujer sin vergüenza" status, or "woman without shame," a charged phrase within marianismo culture. In doing so, we can locate La Llorona and who she was *outside* of the narrative frame she was given, and in extension, other women, too, much like Alicia Gaspar de Alba's "unframing" strategies. A culmination of unframing occurs when the girls meet

La Llorona, and the ghost-bruja stands outside of the frame, no panels to contain her. La Llorona is fashioned similarly to her bruja formation as she dons a long dress with a peter pan collar, gingham apron to signal domesticity, and hair with plants in it. Her stillness creates a sort of “audience encore” pause in the form of a “checklist” that asks if they would like to continue with the ghost reveal; however, choice is removed from the reader in a one-page anticipation that reads “now, otra vez (from the source) with feeling” citing a call to authenticity and allure in the performance.

La Llorona is further unframed when her presence shakes the format, diverting from the comic format into a retablo dedicated to the ghost that calls us to empathize with her through the enmeshment of the young girl and La Llorona’s body. In the large retablo that takes up two pages, the head of the young girl replaces the head of La Llorona and is doubled in size, taking up the majority of the illustration. Her head is a mosaic portraying shock and fear, made up of the animals, plants, bedsheet ghosts, and calaveras to symbolize how the stereotypical retellings are deeply embedded in the ways one sees themselves. To recognize this and let go of them would lead to empathy necessary to unframe and understand “who among us hasn’t taken their grief, and stood, contemplating it, beside a body of water” (Artemisa). It calls readers back to the mundane, to how feelings of grief and fear lie underneath the story that perpetuates harm and frames women.

Water Witches of the Mango House: Dreams, Magic, and Outsiderness in Rio de la Luz's *Itza* (2017)

Xicana-Chapina writer Rios de la Luz's *Itza* (2017) explores the merging of gothic horror, magic, and trauma, writing death as potential and wailing as a source of healing. The novella examines a multigenerational family of water witches living in Texas that includes a great grandmother, grandmother, mother, and two daughters by the name of Marisol and Araceli. The text is split into three parts, and the narrative follows the sisters, switching between first-person point of view as they come of age. Marisol narrates her tale of enduring sexual violence at the hands of her step-father and regaining her autonomy later in life while Araceli narrates her journey with her ghost-speaking, water witch powers which she inherited from her great-grandmother. The house, referred to as the Mango house, is a character itself as grief and pain taint the walls. It is reminiscent of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, and *Itza*'s inclusion of witches is reminiscent of the three fates at the end of Cisneros' book. Familial specters such as their great-grandmother and, eventually, their grandmother follow the girls and communicate via television to send messages, making them "technoghosts," or ghosts whose "manifestation is both made possible by technology and mediated through it" (Wetmore QTD in Van Elferen 133). Throughout the text, rituals of water and earth sustain the two sisters emotionally as the past haunts the present of both characters.

La Llorona's presence in the text is carried through the family's matrilineal water witch lineage, and the ghost's hijos that she cries for changes to include the natural world in a way that highlights ecological and reproductive violence. The first two chapters

“Itza” and “Burial” depict the deaths and burial rites of Abuelita (great-grandmother) and Abuela (grandmother), characters who raised Marisol and Araceli. *Itza*, which translates to “enchanted waters,” begins with the death of the great grandmother who died in her sleep and was found in the middle of the forest. Instead of seeing Abuelita’s death as demise, the speaker discusses how death was her grandmother’s dream. She states:

We told the neighbors it was her dream to wander in the forest as a ghost. As a ghost, she can blend with the fog and follow rivers slithering into creeks. She can pick up after litter bugs and flick the backs of their heads. [...] She can follow the hunters with their rifles, to see if ghosts have more power than guns. (1-2)

Death is not a feared end of life; rather, it is a dream that offers ghostliness, and in turn, mobility. Like La Llorona, she “follows rivers slithering into creeks,” and punishes those that desecrate nature by littering by “flick[ing] the backs of their heads” (1-2). The grandmother, through death, terrorizes hunters who hunt animals “to see if ghosts have more power than guns” (2). Abuelita’s ghost intervenes by disrupting violent deaths of animals and desecration of the forest. Relating La Llorona to a symbol of reproductive justice as delineated by Sarah De Los Santos Upton and Leandra Hinojosa Hernández, La Llorona’s hijos start to include the more-than-human. Abuelita is La Llorona here, haunting the creeks and her hijos are more-than-human including the animals and grass.

Horror and violence of dreams exist for a greater, psychic purpose of healing a collective imaginary. For instance, Abuela Rubi carries the psychic and physical weight of her dreams. In a scene where she is volunteering in the desert in the U.S.-Mexico border hauling gallons of water for those that made the crossing journey, Abuela thinks

back to her own naturalization journey, the crossings between the Juarez, Mexico and Texas, U.S.A., and her violent dreams. Here, Abuela's dreams are heavy:

When Abuela was a girl, she dreamt about being split in half, one side of her in the ocean, the other on land, broken tree branches piercing through her, blood flowing into the ocean and into the sand (39)

Avery Gordon argues for the felt and unseen, recognizing societal spectrality. For Abuela, the unseen and felt are the ghosts that cross the border and the invisible labor of crossing wherein "how was a concept for the future" (39). Abuela carries the weight of her dreams as she helps the mutual aid collective. In the dream, Abuela is split in half which points to a reckoning with U.S. and Mexico identity as tied to Gloria Anzaldúa's writings of the Mestiza consciousness; here, the body is literally caught in and by its painful environment. Interestingly, one side is on land while the other remains in the ocean. The ties to the ocean can be tied to La Llorona and her own mobility and crossings as her story shifts from one border to another and also as she roams the rivers. The "broken tree branches piercing through her" signify a body that is trapped, stuck in between as her "blood flow[s] into the ocean and into the sand" (39). According to Charles L. Crow, the gothic is a place wherein psychic prisons contain a person, and here the prison of her dream, as well as the prison the branches and geopolitical borders create, as emphasized in order to demonstrate these horrors made invisible to mainstream society. Abuela also carries collective *susto*. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, *susto*, translated to "fright," is the eternal state that La Llorona lives by as *susto* is felt both by the body and the psyche. Moreover, Saraliza Anzaldúa describes *susto* as defined

communally, suggesting that *susto* should be examined for how it discusses physical, spiritual, and psychic ailments. In analyzing Gloria Anzaldúa's interpretation of *susto* that rips people away from the world, Saraliza Anzaldúa deploys a communal approach to *susto*, which I am interested in. She writes, "loss of trust in the world goes on to have consequences for community relationships" under *susto* which proves how "*susto* is thus not merely an individual trauma, it is a community trauma" (62). Mainstream society ignores the deaths of the migrants while Abuela and the community of volunteers heal by leaving the migrants gallons of water at the border. They find that each death reverberates and that community work can address these ongoing racial traumas. Like La Llorona, Abuela resides by water, bringing water to the desert. She also creates altars with the migrants' possessions and mourns the migrants that do not make the journey. Anzaldúa writes that as a mother, La Llorona mourns for her children while living by *susto*—this is similar to how Abuela remembers the migrants through her altars. Like La Llorona, she mourns for a collective, and the altar is a practice of healing work that relies on the act of remembrance (a healing work that is also seen in *The Haunting of Alejandra*).

Ofrenda, or altar, building becomes a central part of *Itza* as the girls use their magic as water witches to remember their family and survive the racial and sexual violence they endure in their everyday lives. The ofrendas that they build pose a *rasquache* sensibility in a domestic gothic setting that is the Mango House. Although the family has an altar of Abuela and Abuelita in the living room, Marisol and Araceli opt to make an altar themselves. When discussing where the altar would be built, the sisters narrow down their options to the natural world, away from their mother and the Mango

House. Araceli reasons that “it could be a really small altar under the roots of a pecan tree or an altar in front of nopales sprouting pink and yellow buds” (86). The sisters choose a tree near the cemetery, and they grab photos of Abuelita and Abuela, Abuela’s hair, pieces of fabric cut from Abuela’s nightgown, sage, coyote teeth, and white beads (87). The girls make do with the items available to them as the mother’s altar maintains the black and white photographs and Virgencita candles which are more akin to the traditional ofrenda. To make do is a part of the *rasquache* sensibility that Tomas Ybarra-Fausto defines as “rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability yet mindful of stance and style” (85). Dileating altars within the fabric of *rasquache*, artist Amalia Mesa-Bains locates the altar as Chicana *rasquache*, or “domesticana.” Mesa-Bains describes altars as “characterized by accumulation, display, and abundance” which “allow a commingling of history, faith, and the personal” while centering the family within domestic spaces (93). The collected items from the linen closet, a small space that holds history for the sisters as it is where they wrote spells and stories, signify a deeper connection with the items. The blend of personal everyday items of the deceased and remnants of the natural world display the interconnectedness of life and death that moves beyond the home and offers mobility, showcasing the “domesticana gothic”. The girls are haunted by Abuelita and later told via her television ghost to visit her gravesite—Abuelita’s home in death. At her gravesite, Abuelita sends Marisol a message delivered by paper that reads “this body is yours, it will always be yours,” which marks a moment where Marisol feels seen and heard after the mother’s complicity of the abuse she endured at the hands of the father figure she should have trusted (96). The haunting of the Mango House by the ancestral

ghosts is mediated by the altar and the television, turning everyday objects into the technology with which ghosts “make do” to communicate.

By claiming themselves as water witches in their own right, Marisol and Araceli locate themselves within the maternal matrices of La Llorona, a symbol, whose association with water, becomes a conduit for understanding trauma while reassessing fear and horror. Water is often associated with dreams and with the feelings of lightness and heaviness in order to evoke a reflection of the felt experience of these characters as Latinas living in the United States. In “Drenched,” Araceli gets caught in the rain with Abuela. Abuela “in bare feet and a lemon yellow tracksuit [...] came to feel the water on her face” while Marisol “followed with her shaved head” (16). To Araceli, Marisol, and Abuela, the water is not to be feared or avoided; instead, the water is meant to be felt especially for its heaviness. Heaviness is typically a negatively associated feeling, but for the water witches, one must steep in it. Araceli “loved the weight of wet clothes, she loved the feeling heavier than gravity meant to make her, she loved flailing herself around and stumbling over her own body” (17). Rather than loving water despite or in spite of its heaviness, she embraces that feeling of excess heaviness on her body even as she flails and stumbles. The three grow unintelligible as they speak in tongues, alluding to religious revelations. In this remembered scene, Araceli recalls them “stuck in time underwater only to emerge to the surface with gills on the sides of their necks,” turning them into animals whose natural element is water reveals the freeness that water, in addition to the way it works to pull one down, offers. I extend Cathryn Merla-Watson’s approach to La Llorona that highlights La Llorona for her mobility. To Araceli, Marisol,

and Abuela, water offers a heavy mobility wherein they tie water to coping and healing with difficult times, and yet, it is the only way to swim through these times. Marisol compares failed calls for help to drowning in “Shrine” as she grapples with trying to move on with her life, but her childhood abuser haunts her. In “Only in Soft Noise,” she prays to Abuela and Abuelita to “lead him into the ocean” since “reality was frightening and [she] felt lost” (64). Water is recognized here as a destructive element that Abuela and Abuelita, as water witches, can lead the abuser into in order to release Marisol. However, even when her abuse stops, Marisol is haunted by her abuse and so is the Mango House where the abuse occurred. Therefore, water does not wash away, like La Llorona, water functions as a destructive force that can help one, in the blurred dream/reality and prayer space, process trauma, fear, and horror.

Marisol’s wailing is a buildup of the tears she sheds throughout her adolescence, making adolescence excessive and tied to La Llorona. After her stepfather’s sexual abuse and the loss of her grandmother, Marisol is described as a wailing woman as “the loss of Abuela launched Marisol into deep explosions of grief” (84). Here, grief is described as explosive but profound, like a fire spark ready to heat at any moment. Under Chicana Feminism, heat and fire are productive and generative, but Marisol’s grief is misunderstood as inefficient; in other words, she is also dubbed a chillona (or cry baby) as even her teachers “don’t know what to do with this chillona. No se calma (she won’t calm down)” (84). Even though she is expressing a deep emotion that assists her in processing what has happened to her, Marisol’s inability to keep crying brief and private

marks her body as excessive because teachers, authorities in controlled classroom environments, do not know what to do with her. Her sister, Araceli, notes how:

Marisol's body contorts before she goes to bed. She cries in silence, her body convulses in grief. She cries while she's dreaming. She's the Mango House's own llorona. The only moments of peace are when she's so exhausted, her head collapses into the pillow. She snores and it echoes off the lavender walls of our room. (85)

Marisol's mindbodyspirit is fully engaged in the act of crying as her "body contorts" and despite crying in silence, her "body convulses" which dubs her the Mango House's Llorona. She starts as chillona to Llorona in the process of attempting to cry in silence, but even in her only moments of peace when she is asleep, her snores "[echo] off the lavender walls"--her grief cannot be silenced. While she does not follow the exact narrative of La Llorona (a woman, scorned by her lover, kills her children), since she is a girl, Marisol's wailing woman status attaches girlhood to wailing.

The wailing woman symbol embraces outsider identities, highlighting how accessing the "ugly" part of grief, fear, and anger can be liberating and posit a rasquache way of being. When Marisol gets older, her wailing becomes even more exaggerated and out of control, and after years of trying to comprehend her trauma, Marisol turns to goth and punk influences. Due to this liberatory aspect, I add the parenthetical to form the "Domesticana Goth(ic)." The parenthetical is used as a signal to include both goth and gothic expressions as they explore outsiderness, alternative perspectives on death,

containment and unraveling. I also add that it embodies a rasquache sensibility, or Tomas Ybarra-Fausto describes as an “outsider viewpoint” which:

posit[s] a bawdy, spunky consciousness seeking to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down—a witty irreverent and impertinent picture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries (85).

Within Latinx media and cultural studies discourse, Richard T. Rodríguez discusses post-punk British and U.S. Latinx intimacies, highlighting the relationship between post-punk musical icon Siouxsie Sioux and post-punk, goth, and misfit Latinas through Junot Diaz’s Afro-Latina character, Lola, illustrated by Chicano artist Jaime Hernández, Erika L. Sánchez’s protagonist, Julia (*I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, 2017), Shizu Saldamando’s drawing *Sandy and Siouxsie* (2017), and Alice Bag’s “Modern Day Virgin Sacrifice” (2016). Rodríguez suggests that Latina depictions and interactions with musical icon Siouxsie Sioux “materializes as a transatlantic intimacy arising from a distinctly situated yet mutual sense of otherness” as “drawing influence from Siouxsie and the Banshees as a way to navigate the normatives terrain shot through with social hierarchies, their esteem of Siouxsie derives from outsider identification” (45). Goth, post-punk, and misfit subcultures are engaged in stylizations of the body that embrace embodied excess, and Latina artists and writers access stylization of the body and the ghostly in tandem with authorship.

For Marisol, these goth and punk influences become a way to access sexual and emotional liberation. She “ha[s] crushes on female musicians” who she sees “as wild women, women who howled and scraped at stages with glittering fingernails, women

who glistened in sweat” (101). Wailing allows her to explore her sexuality as she appreciates the howling, scraping, and sweating of these women on stage so publicly for all to witness. Their wailing becomes howling and scraping, and at a concert, Marisol and others are able to not only witness but to join. The reference to “wild women” connotes a misfit, or Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s “bad woman” who does not fit in with the tenets of marianismo, and even Delilah Montoya’s “hocicona,” or “loud mouth” which is fixated on refusing common expectations of marianismo.

As a result, the Domesticana gothic shown in *Itza* examines La Llorona’s spectrality as deadly potential, positing a bruja positionality through the characters’ status of water witches. Irene Lara writes that thinking through a bruja positionality allows us to think towards transformation; therefore, associating La Llorona with a coven of water witches transforms common notions of light and darkness, creation and destruction. By turning to poetry and music, Marisol learns other ways to express herself and to wail. Interestingly, Robin Roberts dubs La Llorona as a “specter who has no voice or pen” (64). In *Itza*, this Llorona utilizes her voice and pen. Marisol’s poetry takes on an embodied approach as “she kept the poems that sat in her guts” (102). According to Gloria Anzaldúa, “writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, working from the inside out” because “the body is a text” (5). Expressing oneself through poetry and music, extending Anzaldúa’s approach, signifies how invested the body is in a spiritual, transformative process. Therefore, poetry and music are also a site of destruction and transformation as grief spills on the page and on stage. This desire to express anger, grief,

and fear via the body is shown with Marisol's desire to "be a rockstar who stomped on the heads of perverts" and at the same time:

She wanted to scream on a stage until her ears bled, until the veins in her throat burst. She wanted to feel safety in her own power. She put both of her middle fingers up at the mirror and stuck her tongue out. Thirteen was the year of wearing black. She wanted to blend with the night sky and pitch black moments in dreams where she searched for her Tia Lucia and then they both ran toward the dark waters hand in hand until they drowned in warmth (104).

The excessive emotion of "screaming until her ears bled" and "until the veins in her throat burst" emphasize the destruction and unraveling needed to "feel safety in her own power" (104). In a book talk with Ingrid Rojas Contreras at the Bay Area Festival of Books in 2024, Myriam Gurba recounts her experiences as a domestic abuse survivor and discusses how rage is necessary when surviving violence. She says, "I began experiencing flashes of rage [...] that was when I began to consider liberation" because "in my numbness, I could not contemplate liberation" (21:54). To survive, Marisol turns to rage. She wears black, alluding to a goth/punk adjacent identity, to emphasize her alignment with death instead of feeling afraid of it. She embraces death as she searches for her Tia Lucia, and reaching the "dark waters hand in hand until they drowned in warmth" turns death into a warm, pleasant state. Depicting the dark waters as potentially holding warmth turns La Llorona into a specter of possibility all as she holds destruction in her hand. Holding the possibility to embrace death as water witches, Lara's bruja positionality is applied here. Lara's bruja positionality rejects the binary between "bruja

mala” and “curandera,” claiming that “brujas—who have been causing trouble for dominant societies for centuries—are an appropriate symbol for Chicana/Latina feminists to reclaim” (28). Based from previous descriptions of marianismo, it is safe to assume that “causing trouble” can include forms of speaking. Gloria Anzaldua describes this in *Borderlands / La Frontera*, wherein stepping out of the quiet, passive role for Chicanas is already considered trouble. One might be labeled an “hocicona,” or loudmouth, even anyone who uses the written form as a type of expression can be a part of this causing trouble.

Brujas cause trouble, defined under marianismo as self-expression and liberation, and it is trouble that liberates Marisol. She feels free through poetry and the magic rituals she does with her sister as well as through punk, rocker, goth, and misfit identities. Her crying turns into shouts as “when she feels the lump in her throat, she shouts at the sky,” a shout reminiscent to the hollering of Felice in Sandra Cisneros’ “Woman Hollering Creek” which is emblematic of a process from crying and wailing to hollering from happiness and liberation (124). The shouts that stemmed from being able to connect with misfit identities leads Marisol to this new shout where she can fully believe that the abuse “was never her fault” and that “she deserved so much more” (124). The misfit adjacent identity is further explored when she is eighteen years old in the chapter “Blurred into Time.” Marisol contacts a photographer who takes naked pictures of varied, alternative bodies because she “wanted to be ugly on camera” and look like a skeleton (120). Earlier, Araceli and Marisol dress as skeletons to bury Abuelita as they dub skeleton paint their

“future bodies.” The future is in the present as Marisol asks the photographer to be depicted like a skeleton:

She wore skull makeup and smeared it all over the motel walls. She smeared her lips over her wrists and she shaved her head in front of this stranger. [...] She took her finger and fish-hooked her cheek open and let out a grunt. She sat hunched over so her belly stuck out. She pretended to be pregnant with a succulent rooting itself to her uterine lining. She didn't say much to the stranger, but he told her she smelled nice and he told her she was weird. [...] she wondered if this is what white men dream about.[...] she searches for ways to see herself as more than the body she has attempted to escape out of since childhood.

Taking on a goth/punk/misfit identity allows Marisol to explore the ugliness and beauty of a body simultaneously as just a body that is hers. She fish-hooks her cheeks open, an "unattractive" look that is excessive and loud compared to a demure smile; she sits hunched over and juts out her belly, a posture opposite to desired youth and thinness pushed onto women regardless of age. The ugliness which she explores confronts discomfort and embraces what is considered “disgusting” and undesirable. In a discussion of disgust, Sianne Ngai writes about disgust in contrast to desire, stating that “while desire is often noisy and amorphous” disgust is “a structured and agonistic emotion carrying a strong and unmistakable signal” for “disgust is never ambivalent about its object” (335). Moreover, Ngai writes that disgust ensures clear boundaries between the subject and object. In this scene with her body, Marisol blurs these boundaries. After experiencing a lack of agency and autonomy from racial and sexual violence that resulted

in a detachment from her body, she embraces what is typically considered opposite to desirable or the status quo through goth, punk, and misfit stylizations and principles. Described as weird, she is also aware and questions if her pose at this moment can possibly be fetishized or turned into an object.

Finally, Marisol is not the only character to embrace misfit and messiness in her transformation. The Mango House's haunting personifies the Mango House as a domestic specter since the house is haunted because of the violence the walls witnessed and felt. In the chapter titled "The Mango House," Araceli and Marisol decide to return to the Mango House as adults. They note that the Mango House sits in a "ghost dimension" Saraliza Anzaldúa defines *susto* as a physical illness that results from "the physical splitting of one's spirit from the world" (59). The Mango House, as personified, has moved into a ghostly dimension because of the pain it witnessed. This is evidenced by the mother forbidding Marisol and Araceli from returning because the house held "too many demons, too many reminders of how things used to be" (133). Dona Alma, the older woman who cares for the house, tells the sisters of the Mango House's transformation into the Lima House and its haunting. The house is now green on the outside, but the inside remains haunted which demonstrates a misalignment in outside appearances, misaligning with unresolved pain. No one lives in the house because:

shadows lurked in the corners of your eyes longer than they should have.

Electricity danced and flickered on and off to the rhythm of songs [...] Someone knocked on windows during full moons, and when you opened your eyes and looked out, there was nothing. (134)

The amount of shadow and spectrality eclipsing happiness did not scare Marisol—instead, she laughs and recounts how “the Mango House always belonged to women like them,” referring to women who struggle and hold each other through hardship. The following chapter “Newborn” describes how the sisters destroyed the interiors of the Mango House, “tak[ing] acrylic paint and splatt[ering] colors onto every inch of the room [...] throw[ing] glitter on the walls” and “tear[ing] out the ceiling so the sun could shine through” (136). The transformation of the Mango House to the Lima House is messy and characterized by an unorganized spilling of color, mixing of mediums like glitter, and destruction of walls. To make it into a “makeshift greenhouse,” the ceiling is not simply removed or lifted but torn so that the sun can shine though (136). The house becomes a greenhouse for houseplants that use up spaces for their own and is open to the community of young children and elderly women who have moved into the neighborhood. It becomes an offering space where “donas brought their offerings of white feathers and silk. They came by to talk to the plantitas. They stopped by to meditate [...] children wandered in and painted suns and planets” (137). Now, the interior and exterior of the house are a green that breathes life and is constantly visited by people while the messiness of its walls and holes remain part of its fixture as an offering itself.

La Llorona as Generational Curse in V. Castro’s *The Haunting of Alejandra*

Focused on girlhood and motherhood, *The Haunting of Alejandra* by V. Castro depicts La Llorona as a generational curse, portraying hauntings as an address to gender-based violence. The novel is in third person perspective as it follows Alejandra and women in her family including her mother, grandmother, and other ancestors. Alejandra,

who is a mother to three children, struggles with depressive symptoms stemming from the societal and familial pressures of motherhood and heterosexism as well as unresolved trauma from her evangelical, racist, anti-queer upbringing as an adoptee. She lives a conventionally happy life upon first glance—she is a stay-at-home mother raising three children and is married to a wealthy businessman that can provide for her materially. However, on the inside, she is unsatisfied with her restricted life as a mother, unhappy with her marriage, and often ruminates on the queer and cultural experiences she missed out on due to her white, evangelical upbringing. Upon seeing a demon in her kids' room and hearing a voice urging her to end it all, she ultimately discovers that her family is being haunted by La Llorona, or the Creature, a fish-like demon that creates Lloronas. By feeding off feelings of unworthiness and fear in Alejandra's matrilineal bloodline, the demon forces Alejandra and the women in her family into corners where the women must either kill themselves or their children. To resolve her own stress and trauma, Alejandra seeks assistance from a therapist curandera, Melanie, and her biological mother and doctor, Cathy. Using both Melanie's curandera guidance and the assistance of Cathy's biomedical approaches, Alejandra must vanquish the demon by connecting with the power of her femme ancestors. The Domesticana gothic puts into focus how the ghosts of our past manifest and help create a toolkit of alternative modes of healing to combat generational demons, and I trace this in *The Haunting of Alejandra*.

The literal demonization of La Llorona creates a space for the inexplicable to reveal the horrors of colonization and patriarchy. The Creature has been around for centuries, feeding off the negative thoughts of mothers. It creates these thoughts amidst

circumstances of racial, colonial and gender-based violence in an endless loop; as a result, the Creature successfully closes death deals to ensure itself a satisfying meal in the moment and for years to come. The conditions that the Creature has determined are necessary for its never-ending feast include colonization and patriarchal spaces that push gender roles, whiteness, and biomedical models that distrust women. For instance, the first Llorona that the Creature creates from Alejandra's family is Atzi, an indigenous woman trying to escape sexual and racial violence in the year 1522. Left with no choices, "death was the only escape from the curse of being a branded and conquered woman, as Atzi was" (34). Here, the curse stems from colonization, and the perpetrators, including the man who raped and impregnated Atzi, are likened to demons: "All of them were demons: They arrived in a horde, in waves of conquest and exploration and destruction, all done in the name of their king and god" (35). The text positions the Creature and Colonizers as demons, yet explicates how the Creature, similar to a baby, simply wants to feed (albeit, excessively) while the Colonizers find justification in their atrocities because they commit their crimes "in the name of their king and god" (38). The Creature is opportunistic, provoking depressive thoughts and desperation upon women who are already backed into a corner by patriarchal systems. As the Creature feeds off "crying women no one could save or believe," the Colonizers "fed off chaos as much as it did the wails of innocents" (40). Despite the Creature's chaotic nature, it appears to have more order than the Colonizers as seen through the Creature keeping its end of Atzi's promise and killing Sebastien. The Creature does this by taking on the appearance of an indigenous woman, and as the story continues, its poor ability to mimic through voice

and appearance—by adorning itself with huipil squares, fishscales, and umbilical chords—becomes a way it maintains connections to the cursed women whereas the Colonizers do not have to try to mimic human appearances. While the creature attempts to be more human-like in its form, resembling the visage of what we know from the tale of La Llorona, the Colonizers in Atzi's chapter do not have to disguise themselves to appear human yet their actions are inhumane, deplorable, and thrive off degradation. Similar to how the previous chapter described Ini from "Ini Y Fati" as weird, Castro demonstrates how an other worldly chaotic demon compares to a human colonizer that brutalizes women. Through patriarchy and white supremacy, they created a legacy of colonization that continuously inflicts violence onto women of color—the Creature is simply there out of convenience.

La Llorona's demonization creates a system wherein curanderas and ghosts of ancestors are guides to heal generational traumas. The Creature, referred to as La Llorona in moments, reveals that they are involved in the process of creating lloronas, and the lloronas, such as Atzi and Francis who give their lives up, are the ghosts who aid Alejandra in healing. The ghosts in the book are Alejandra's ancestors, and dreams become a space where the hauntings unravel. Like *Itza*, ghosts haunt dreams and remind one about generational susto. Susto, according to Gloria Anzaldúa, is characterized by fragmentation after suffering from the traumas of racism and colonial abuses. Since her haunting, Alejandra dreams of a mysterious woman she later finds out is Flor, her ancestor. With the guidance of Melanie, Alejandra creates an altar where the small material remnants of her ancestors' past, like cloth and buttons, help guide and protect

her. Melanie's curandernismo emphasizes the importance of material objects. According to Saraliza Anzaldúa, "many Chicane communities use the healing system curanderismo, which constitutes a monistic worldview grounded in the Mesihka (Mexica/Aztec) metaphysical system based on teotl – a force that is both matter and movement which forms the shapes of all that exists" (55). Melanie explains altar building as a way to connect with the women ancestors in Alejandra's dreams that want to communicate with her; therefore, the altar she creates assists in maintaining connection to ancestors as well as "a place to celebrate those that are living" such as her daughter, Catrina, whom she keeps at a distance due to her fears of being a bad mother (114).

Like Vanessa Angélica Villarreal and Rios De la Luz, V. Castro writes domesticity as spaces where hauntings, wounds, and nostalgic memories coexist since under patriarchy, "The domestic chamber, then, has become a space imbued with a sense of both saliency and isolation" (Mesa-Baines 94-5). Alejandra places Flor and Catrina to represent open wounds from the past and present that need healing. Francis, Alejandra's deceased grandmother, and Cathy, her living biological mother, are included, too, as Alejandra recognizes the women as part of a generational curse since Francis abandoned Cathy and Cathy abandoned Alejandra. Building from an Anzaldúan approach to open wounds and healing, Amanda Ellis writes that curanderas, in this case, Melanie, are represented by authors by "draw[ing] attention to the perdition caused by communal, spatial, and/or psychic "open wounds" and inscribe their own theorizations of healing through the figure of la curandera" (13). Through Melanie, Alejandra is able to begin

healing the *herida abierta* (Anzaldúa) as she maintains her connections to the ghosts that help her vanquish the Creature and mend the relationship with her daughter.

Moreover, Cathy's connection to Western medicine as well as Melanie's dual investment in curanderismo and Western therapy work to highlight the socially spectral and bolster the mindbodyspirit connection via outsider viewpoints. Haunted by the Creature's negative voice during her teenage pregnancy, Cathy chose to pursue medicine as a way to opt out of the nuclear family life even if it meant going outside of expectations for a pregnant teen. For her, medicine was the "out." Although at first skeptical of having witnessed a ghost, Cathy becomes a source of support for Alejandra when it is time to fake her death in order to defeat the Creature. She tells Alejandra about the veins and places she can cut to make the bleeding real and get her close to death as a way to lure the Creature that feeds on death. Similarly, Melanie assists with helping Alejandra's physical and mental ailments. When Alejandra asks how Melanie blends curanderismo and therapy, Melanie replies by pointing out the unseen, "I believe in two worlds. This one and everything else we don't see [...] I don't really know what form the other side takes, but I *feel* it" (115). Melanie continues, "curanderismo began as healthcare. Our ancestors were deprived of so many things by the colonizers. We had to do it for ourselves" (115). Melanie's response emphasizes curanderismo as communal healthcare that survived colonization. Saraliza Anzaldúa argues for the recognition of curanderismo as a valid health and medicine practice by Western medicine rather than dismissing practitioners of curanderismo. Anzaldúa emphasizes the communal aspect of *susto* and the necessity of curanderismo, stating:

The Chicane community has been and continues to be the site of colonial trauma. From the initial genocide by Spanish invaders and enslavement by Catholic missionaries/Spanish authorities, to the devastating effects of the Euro-American invasion of Mexico and subsequent efforts to eradicate Chicane communities with militias and forced deportation (62).

Curanderismo has been passed on matrilineally for generations in Melanie's family. She does not dismiss Alejandra's haunting, and instead, takes it seriously, offering her a toolkit that includes obsidian, accepting love, prioritizing oneself, and creating an ofrenda (later, a process that is seen as healing and creative). This makes Melanie a threat to the Creature, and during an altercation, the Creature retaliates against Melanie's knowledge by calling her a "disgusting, blasphemous witch" (Castro 163). Melanie's use of curanderismo and acknowledgement of Alejandra's haunting is what helps mend Alejandra's relationship with her biological mother, her daughter, and herself. Although La Llorona has been marked as a maternal ghost by scholars, I urge that girlhood should be examined as the demon in *The Haunting of Alejandra* denotes how childhood trauma is not isolated from the fears that haunt motherhood—in fact, they are inextricably linked.

Conclusion

The fashioning of ofrendas and self-fashioning efforts of Latinas as well as the bruja-fication of La Llorona as an ghostly embodiment of rage, broken hearts, and grief illuminate the margins she walks. Thus, her reinterpretations into goth, gothic, horror, and magical settings demonstrate the artifice of ugliness, beauty, and its nebulous

contours, particularly when exploring queer identities. In the next chapter, I move into discussing queer and youth representations in work intended for youth audiences. Similarly, folktales will be a part of the discussion as they work to perpetuate narratives that suppress women and their gender and sexuality. In an analysis of Romina Garber's *Wolves of No World* series, chapter three examines the outsider identities in a Latinx mainstream world. The bruja and witch-like myths are theorized in this chapter as well as issues of invisibility and hypervisibility.

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Re-Writing the Body: Lycanthropy, Nerds, and Outsiders in Romina Garber's *Wolves of No Worlds*

One of the fondest quotidian childhood memories I hold includes when I used to watch telenovelas with my mother while I assisted her with cooking that night's dinner for the family. On a Sony Mini TV in the kitchen corner, we watched shows like *La Fea Mas Bella* (2006) ("The Most Beautiful Ugly Girl"), or the Mexican soap opera version of *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, about a woman who was perceived as unfashionable and ugly until she was transformed into a conventionally beautiful and fashionable woman through makeup, clothing, and perfecting gendered social etiquette. I recall her makeover as a transformation where her body becomes a possession to be written upon—she sits in a chair, surrounded by five to six makeup artists and stylists when the camera suddenly turns to first person perspective. The audience is Lety for a moment as the crowd of stylists close in on her, grabbing her by the garments and, for comedic effect, even hypnotizing her so that she believes she embodies this transformation in her attitude. This enclosure results in a new alter-ego, Aurora, a red-haired woman who Lety presents as, modulating her speaking voice differently altogether from the shy version of herself and capturing the desire of the men that are repulsed by Lety. In their book *Humor and Latina/o camp in Ugly Betty: Funny looking* (2015) which discusses the U.S. adaptation of Colombia's *The Most Beautiful Ugly Girl* titled *Ugly Betty* (2006) as a text that takes on a borderlands sensibility, scholars Tanya González and Eliza Rodríguez y Gibson connect transformation to performance of gender, citing Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Transformation is a method where gender is performed via the body, bringing to light how Chicana feminist scholars continue to examine transformation

within Latinx texts. For Amanda Ellis, transformation via magical metamorphosis, or stories that center the transition from human to animal using magic, signify self-destruction as a way to confront pain and take flight (79). In linking transformation with gender, performance, narrative, confronting generational pain, and flight, I turn to how Latinas utilize lycanthropy, or the transformation of a human into wolf, a common trope in gothic and horror literary and cultural production, to demonstrate how the body is written on, and in turn, writes itself. Who gets to create narratives about Latina bodies? How do Latinas use gothic elements to challenge these narratives about Latina bodies? Taking a transnational feminist approach, I will analyze Romina Garber's Argentinian folklore inspired *Wolves of No World* series, which consists of *Lobizona* (2020) and *Cazadora* (2021), for how Garber utilizes lycanthropy to theorize the queer potential of gender, sexuality, and desire through the undocumented teen werewolf protagonist, Manu, while also discussing the paradoxical prison of the family and social movements to a young adult audience.

Chicana Feminism: Speculating the Shadow-Beast towards Lycanthropy

As discussed in Chapter 2, Chicana feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba have theorized the “bad woman” and how myths like that of La Malinche and stories including those of La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe work to create a culture of suspicion and mistrust where women are not trusted. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Anzaldúa links women to the supernatural, describing the treatment

of women as Other in the manifestation of the “Shadow-Beast,” or the relegating of women into a space where:

Woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine, she must be protected.

Protected from herself. Woman is the stranger, the other. She is man’s recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast. The sight of her sends him into a frenzy of anger and fear. (39)

Cited previously, Chicana feminist scholar Orquidea Morales connects Anzaldúa’s theorization of the shadow-beast to Barbara Creed whose theories of the monstrous feminine situate the mother within the realm of abjection, and figures in horror who do not respect boundaries, including werewolves, witches, ghosts, and the monstrous feminine are the abject. Creed applies Julia Kristeva’s “abjection” theory to horror films thereby stating that the mother exists in the realm of abjection and horror by wanting the child to remain with her, preventing the child from entering or taking their rightful place in the symbolic world or the law of the father (paternal law). Instead, the mother keeps the child within the maternal law where waste, boundaries, and order are not a concern. It is horrific then when the mother wants the child to remain close because it is disturbing the paternal order, and the paternal order’s association with language is a primary concern. I am particularly concerned with this application of Kristeva from Creed based on the way that Creed situates the monstrous body in relation to the child. Interestingly, Morales claims that “where Creed and Anzaldúa differ is because the latter pushes for not just an understanding and naming of the monstrous-feminine but the possibility that this monstrous figure is a necessary step in the path to a new consciousness” (50). Moreover,

Anzaldúa's new consciousness that comes from the monstrous feminine, the mestiza consciousness, operates in a pluralistic mode where ambiguity and contradictions are tolerated and "nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (101). Thus, the domesticana gothic extends that lycanthropy is part of this shadow-beast and pluralistic mode that allows us to witness how the monstrous feminine is a productive and generative space for ambiguity and contradiction through a hybridized body that is a common figure within gothic and horror genres.

Lycanthropy has been studied for its horror, gothic, and ecological adaptations in films, television, and literature like *The Curse of the Werewolf: Fantasy, Horror and the Beast Within* by Bourgault du Coudray Chantal (2006), *The Werewolf Book: The Encyclopedia of Shape-Shifting Beings* (2011) by Brad Steiger, Brent Stypczynski's *The Modern Literary Werewolf: A Critical Study of the Mutable Motif* (2013), PBS's *Monstrum* series, and *The Ecogothic Werewolf in Literature: Wolves, Woods and Wilderness* (2025) by Kaja Franck. Robert McKay and John Miller recognize the werewolf as a liminal figure that looms in the imagination of the gothic who "in their embodiment of the ravenous, the monstrous, the perverse and the excessive, [...] function as a site for working out or contesting complex anxieties of difference: of gender, class, race, space, nation or sexuality." In applying Andrew Smith and William Hughes' ecoGothic lens, McKay and Miller position the werewolf within the landscape to construct how the figure functions within the Gothic Body composed of an ambivalent nature that contains monsters which represent modern anxieties. As a result, the borders

between human and wolf are distinguished as porous. Bourgault du Coudray Chantal views lycanthropy tales as tales of negotiating personhood, as viewed through the Enlightenment age that identified boundaries between personhood as interior and exterior and via gothic and horror texts that aim to draw and redraw these lines. Du Coudray Chantal's comparison between the female werewolf and male werewolf seems to reveal boundaries between gender, sex, sexuality, and performativity. I suggest we approach lycanthropy in these QYLA texts, a genre known for grappling with tales of defining personhood, by rejecting strict boundaries and viewing borders as porous as Romina Garber's *Lobizona* uses the femme werewolf as a symbol of porous borders through Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness in order to demonstrate the potential of childhood.

In addition, I agree with Kaja Franck's assertion that we move beyond the the common interpretation of teenage werewolves as simply metaphorical for puberty, and rather, we start viewing teenage werewolves for how, in breaking boundaries, they "offer the possibility of freedom from the binary structure of human versus animal" (163). This binary structure that the werewolf contains the "animal" side of someone reinforces binaries like "human/animal," "man as logical person who has the right to govern their body versus woman as illogical, desiring only flesh and cannot govern their body," or "language / mute" (170). Franck's assertion that stories of teenage werewolves "gives a space for imagination to think beyond the human 'I'" allows us to acknowledge a variety of subjectivities and connections to the body. Werewolves create "a space to consider non-human identity" to illustrate a connection between how Anzaldúa's "shadow-beast" moves us toward a mestiza consciousness (170). This, in turn, illustrates the potential of

language to voice experiences and control narratives, particularly to serve a political purpose. In *Wolves of No World*, the shadow-beast that is the protagonist, Manu, inhabits a body that is policed and defined by the government as aberrant because of the gender-sex conflation and dehumanization of undocumented people. Her lycanthropy is a result of a werewolf and human romance which places a mirror to Septimus society as a shadow-beast reflects the inner turmoil of a society, which in this case includes breaking gender roles, queerness, and miscegenation. By breaking down common political narrative strategies and widening social consciousness through literature, I apply Anzaldúa's "shadow-beast" to Franck's assertion to link teen lycanthropy to language and development through assessing what Manu's transformation signifies to herself, her queer peers, and to society.

Speculating the Outsider in QYLA

Up until now, I have analyzed texts that represent or portray childhood, and in this chapter, I explore a portrayal of Latina childhood that is aimed at young adult audiences. The targeted audiences are not reflecting on childhood from a temporal distance; instead, the targeted audience of *Wolves of No World* includes adolescents between the ages of ten to eighteen where their dependence on adults around them is still present, but they are gaining their own sense of agency presumably through choices such as selecting friends, figuring out their place in their social world, understanding their body which may undergo changes and transformations due to puberty between these times, and for some, grappling with their sexual orientation and gender expression within a heterosexist

society. Speculative literature and the gothic become unique modalities that allow young adult audiences to speculate the potential, indeterminate, and transitional period between childhood and adulthood. While texts like *Altermundos* (2017) have elaborated on Latinx gothic cultural and literary production, a focus on childhood and texts produced for young audiences are yet to be fully discussed within the context of the speculative. Thus, I build from scholars including Trevor Boffone, Cristina Herrera, Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez, and Cristina Rhodes who have contributed to this emerging field of literary scholarship. Books such as *Atravesados: Essays on Queer Latinx Young Adult Literature* (2025) and *Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks: Outsiders in Chicana and Latinx Young Adult Literature* feature selected scholarship on speculative Latinx young adult literature for the ways that the genre of the speculative (particularly gothic, horror, and sci-fi) can explore the idea of the Outsider or the Atravesado, a term by Gloria Anzaldúa that names those that exist outside of the confines of what is considered normal by mainstream U.S. society and Mexican culture. Trevor Buffone and Cristina Herrera argue for a consideration of Latinx speculative youth literature and the outsider in Latinx young adult fiction whereas the “weird” kid in Latinx mainstream publications is often sidelined. In this case, the weird kid is one who lives outside of mainstream notions of Latinx identity which includes the intelligent Latinx young adult (Herrera’s “ChicaNerd”), the Goth Latinx young adult, and the ‘weird’ one who may not have close ties to their heritage. I extend their centering of “outsider” identities to include UndocuYouth based on the authors’ insistence to “understand Latinx youth identities, it is necessary to shed light on outsiders within an already marginalized ethnic group: nerds, goths, geeks, freaks, and

others who might not fit within Latinx popular cultural paradigms such as the chola and chola, identities that are ever-present in films, television, and the internet” (Boffone and Herrera 7). Similarly expanding Anzaldúa’s work within a YA space, Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez expands Anzaldúa’s “conocimiento” through her term “conocimiento narratives” to document how YA protagonists publicize visual art they create which in turn signifies how this lens “suggests that the conclusions of the texts are not guarantees of a better future but instead offer Latinx children the possibility to imagine new realities” (27). Within YA Latinx speculative fiction and QLYA (Queer Latinx Young Adult Literature), Cristina Rhodes’s “Imagining the Future: The (Im)Possibilities of Queerness in Two Latinx Speculative Young Adult Novels,” published in *Label me Latino/a Journal*, notices a trend of Queer Latinx representation in QYLA wherein the future of Queer young adults do not look promising as books end start and end with their suffering and denial of their true selves. Therefore, Rhodes marks an important and necessary turn towards the ambiguity for futures that QLYA speculative fiction presents as “reading for queer Latinx futures means accepting the necessity for imagination and the promise of a better tomorrow” (8). Building on the work of these scholars, I trace *Lobizona* as a text that grapples with personhood, queerness, and agency that stems from a tale of lycanthropy. In challenging common dynamics between lycanthropy and teenagers, Romina Garber’s *Wolves of No World* series complicates patriarchal notions of gender, citizenship, and personhood to highlight the social construct of government, and in turn, government’s involvement in constructing gender and citizenship that becomes “common sense” once rhetoric has shaped law and policy. Manu, the only hybrid

werewolf-human in the human world and the werewolf world, becomes a revolutionary figure and face of a social movement in the second book, queering what it means to be both human and werewolf. I also touch on the end of the series to discuss how the domesticana gothic within Garber's series reveals about the fate of queer Latinx children.

Doubly Outsider: Containing the Shadow-Beast

The *Wolves of No World* book series is split into two novels: *Lobizona* (2020) and *Cazadora* (2021), and they are intended for young adult readers. As of the writing of this chapter, there is no third novel, but there is a short story in the *Wolves of No World* universe that was published in Zoraida Cordova's *Reclaim the Stars: 17 Tales Across Realms & Space* (2022) titled "Leyenda" with characters including the bruja Zaybet. The first book, *Lobizona*, starts in the human world with Manu, an undocumented teenager of Argentinian descent who lives with her undocumented mother and an elderly woman named Perla in a retirement home in Miami called "El Retiro." Due to her mother's worry that Manu's unique, yellow eyes will draw attention to herself and the family, "El Retiro" essentially functions as a prison since Manu is barred from going outside. Another distinguishing aspect that makes Manu unique from other humans includes her suffering of *lunaritis* or intense period pains that are treated by special sedatives her mother supplies, thus pairing lycanthropy with menstruation but not stopping there as a simple metaphor. Daily, her mother warns Manu of ICE raids, and the three women lean on each other for support until one day, her mother is caught and detained. At the moment of her capture, Manu discovers that her mother was working for an underground clinic helping kids like Manu with similar (yet distinct) conditions. In a brave and

impulsive decision to step outside, Manu searches for her absent father's family, hops into the bed of the truck and uncovers a secret community in the Everglades forest filled with individuals with similar eyes. In this "Septimus" world, lobizones (werewolves) are assigned masculine cisgender identities and brujas (witches) are assigned feminine cisgender identities, and through replacement narratives that push fear that humans will eventually wipe septimus out, brujas and lobizones are forced into marriage and reproduction with one another. Septimus society thus conflates sex and gender, restricting gender expression and sexual orientation and promoting heterosexist, patriarchal households as a support for the "cause." Anyone that does not follow these restrictions lives in fear or is at risk of being killed. The first book follows Manu enrolling into an academy of brujas and lobizones to discover that she herself is a lobizona with no manada (pack), making her undocumented in this world, too. Breaking the gender binary by not being a bruja, Manu gains negative public attention, political enemies, and a queer following that culminates in part 2: *Cazadora*. In *Cazadora*, Manu is on the run because Septimus government question how her existence is even possible, even though they do not know the whole truth yet: Manu is also human. Once she reveals her humanity, the Septimus law wants her dead as politicians link her hybrid existence to the myth of *La Ladrona*, a scary story about a border-breaker and border-defyer who will bring with her the end of the world. *Lobizona* focuses on her journey at school and the friends she makes outside of her former containment as she discovers her powers; moreover, *Cazadora* follows Manu to the Coven, an organized group of queer and gender nonconforming individuals that represent a social movement towards progress and

breaking gender, sex, and sexuality constructs. Trials by law and popular opinion are the center of this book as Manu is thrust into the public arena as the undocumented werewolf. This paper will consider both novels of the series but consider *Cazadora* as the part which most develops and confronts ideas of political symbols, narrative, rhetoric, and queer identity.

Through lycanthropy, Manu's initial containment in El Retiro is revealed as a condition that doubly invisibilizes her existence. As stated, at the start of *Lobizona*, Manu lives in El Retiro, a small retirement community, and she is not allowed to go outside because her mother has ingrained in her that visibility means death, repeating the phrase she was taught that "visibility=deportation" and that "deportation is death" as she lives an almost nonexistent life (22-23). Similar to Vanessa Angélica Villarreal's "Assimilation Rooms," Manu's containment, this time away from social institutions rather than in them, marks an area of invisibility that renders her nonexistent and dead. Manu is homeschooled, has no friends her age or interaction with the outside world, and has only one documented photograph of herself. Even in documents like photographs, she is invisible both for her safety based on her status and on her physical condition that makes her a werewolf even prior to activating her werewolf form. The danger of anyone finding out about her hybrid half-human, half-werewolf body and undocumented status relegate her mindbodyspirit to the senior living community space, more specifically to Perla and her mother as her only community. Mary Pat Brady discusses how childhood is constructed for a liberal republic, linking dependence and an inability to self-govern or participate in government. Definitions of childhood that center innocence and the ability

to transition to self-governance and autonomy are only afforded to white peers as it is revoked from BIPOC and undocumented children. Manu does not experience childhood the way most people her age do—she is completely invisible because visibility can mean two types of death for her: the United States subjects her to social death and real, physical and psychological violence which can put her at risk to death if discovered while the Septimus government later demands for her execution. Her childhood is not necessarily marked by innocence either because from a young age, she is fully aware that ICE can separate her family. In addition, her lunaritis, or her medically intense periods that work to suppress the werewolf transformation during puberty, are medically suppressed by the pills her mother brings her from a special clinic meant to treat werewolves living in the human world. As a teenager, Manu’s state of dependence, due to her circumstances, seems like it could go on like this even into adulthood. Out of survival, Manu is subjected to suppression and invisibilizing of her body.

Freedom and autonomy, then, are tied to mobility. Brady asserts that BIPOC folks are rendered perpetual children without the privilege of childhood—one marked by whiteness, innocence, and eventual mobility—as they are surveilled, captured, and enclosed. As an undocumented person, Manu’s status is already one that maintains her captivity as Brady writes: “ [...] life without papers in the twenty-first century must also be understood as a form of captivity, as a flexible enclosure that constrains and delimits socialities just as forced removal and mass deportation have broadened the geometry of captivity seemingly everywhere” (2). Captivity, in the sense of the *domesticana gothic*, takes into account the material realities of Latinx migrants, and it is necessary to note

how the terror of family separation and its possibility haunts and confines Manu. When Manu loses her mother and becomes desperate to fight for her family, she jumps into the bed of a truck, risking hypervisibility and potentially being detained and deported alongside her mother. In the bed of the truck, Manu narrates, “I’m a passenger not just in this vehicle, but in my body, in this country, in my life. Defined by decisions I didn’t make” (*Lobizona* 83). She feels a “terror grip[ping] her mind” as she considers that jumping into the back of a pickup truck might be the end of her, but even while this terror has a hold on her, Manu accepts a possible end since “for the first time, [she’s] in charge of her own destiny” (*Lobizona* 83). The terror that Manu feels is a looming threat of deportation, physical danger, and death, and yet leaving and accessing her werewolf body is the only way for her to attempt to reunify her family. At this point, she has encountered the horror of seeing her family ripped apart by ICE, and the terror of living a contained life continues to haunt her.

Nerdy Teen Werewolves: Reading and Learning as Flight

Before this journey, Manu’s explored other forms of flight through reading books with contained characters including J.K. Rowling’s series *Harry Potter* (1997) which is now associated with Rowling’s transphobia that hurts queer and trans folks, including children, and texts from the Victorian era for “[her] fears of the world had made [her] so afraid to dream” (*Lobizona* 78). In doing so, Manu worldbuilds, or, using José E. Muñoz’s term, disidentifies. Muñoz writes that disidentification “is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a

phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4). Here, the public sphere is the realm of the majoritarian that is phobic, what Muñoz will later imply through his readings as homophobic, sexist, racist, and capitalist. The public upholds white supremacist notions that desire the erasure of minoritarian subjects. However, what happens when a minoritarian subject uses the public sphere, the stage or the art gallery in Muñoz’s readings, to display their existence? What occurs when Manu, a minoritarian subject, connects to majoritarian texts not “meant” for her? What methods are at her disposal? This is where Muñoz’s “survival strategies” phrase plays a significant role as minoritarian subjects desire subjectivity, they will “activate new social relations,” recycling and worldbuilding “within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (5).

Although Manu is Latina and not Chicana, I consider her closely aligned with what Cristina Herrera dubs “ChicaNerd” or “Chicana nerd” which is a term she uses to argue how young Chicanas “voice astute observations of their identities as nonwhite teenagers specifically through a lens of nerdiness—a reclamation of brown girl self-love for being a nerd that demands a more complex, honest representation of Chicana adolescence that we rarely see in mainstream culture” (3). I recognize the necessity for the ChicaNerd purview specific to the Chicana experience and do not mean to homogenize the term by applying it to Manu, an Argentinian-American character. Manu is undocumented and has lived her life in anonymity and secrecy, her mother is detained in the first half of *Lobizona*, and Perla, her grandmother figure, ends up in the hospital.

The ChicaNerd purview is relevant to Manu for how she utilizes books as both a form of flight while she is entrapped and a source of transference for understanding the isolation she undergoes. She claims that one of her cherished book series is *Harry Potter* because Harry has the Weasleys, adding how she “love[s] them because they’re the family [she] long[s] to have” (28). However, there are limitations to how she relates to these books. For instance, when she sees *septibol*, a variation of werewolf and bruja soccer, she attempts to forge a connection with herself and Harry Potter:

I flash to the opening of *Harry Potter*, when Mr. Dursley kept the owls from delivering Harry’s admission letter to Hogwarts. And for one fleeting instant, I let myself believe there’s a world that actually wants me.

But the hope deflates as quickly as it came. For all Ma’s secrets, she’s nothing like the Dursleys. Everything she sacrificed has been to protect my potential, not stifle it. (*Lobizona* 93-4).

This moment refers to her ChicaNerd sensibility where she tries to connect with Harry Potter, a story of a boy whose wizard identity was covered up by his evil step parents, which ultimately fails because a tale like where the Dursleys are strictly bad characters would be easier to digest rather than an experience where a mother resorted to isolating her daughter in order to protect her. Throughout the series, Manu refuses to venerate or denigrate her mother for the tough and hurtful decisions she was forced to make based on two systems: while the U.S. government wanted her family invisible (for their labor) or gone, readers eventually find out that the Septimus government wishes for her death and nonexistence.

Instead, Manu, in the sequel *Cazadora* (2021), connects with the bruja revolutionary Zaybet's complicated love for people that intentionally contain them and unintentionally hurt them. Zaybet, a revolutionary ChicaNerd, recognizes that brujas in the Septimus society only have value if they are married and have children, and she wishes none of this for her own life as she partakes in political movements towards progress. However, she falls in love with her revolutionary partner-in-crime, Tinta, who betrays her by proposing marriage to her. She tells Manu how Tinta ruined their relationship: "To [Tinta], our outside life was the real one and the Coven was the fantasy, For me, it was the other way around" (*Cazadora* 245). Zaybet's awareness of oppression makes it so that the Coven, or her queer underground community engaged in the fight for equality, is not something she can turn her back to where Tinta, a cishet lobizon, can. Manu's identification with Zaybet through their awareness from books and social consciousness comes from the paradox of having love for someone who does not mean to confine them or limit their bodily autonomy but, due to circumstances, can.

Manu's awareness of her body grows with her lycanthropy in contrast to common werewolf narratives that tend to separate human identity and animality. Here, human identity is associated with language, critical thought, governance of the body, and discipline whereas animality lacks all of these attributes and is always at risk of "taking over" in instances of lycanthropy. It is a binary that Franck argues prevents from exploring lycanthropy for its vast possibilities, and a binary, I suggest, is turned on its head in *Wolves of No World* because of the way characters challenge normative ways of being. Franck critiques how lycanthropy has been accessed before by authors and

filmmakers as a place where the human and animal bodies are merged and the struggle then becomes which “side” will eventually take over. Transformation in *Wolves of No World* is a rite of passage rather than the body “acting up” during puberty that one must control. For Manu, transformation is difficult and not fluid at first, and the connection she has between herself and her body is vital to a smooth transition. Manu’s transformation is as narrated:

I feel a painful tug in my uterus.

I bend over and hug my stomach, as agonizing cramps twist my insides. Like my body is assuming a new design. I scream as all my joints crack at once, the bones of my skeleton breaking off. My spine curves as it elongates and fangs pierce my gums, my skull tingling as my hair grows out. I stare at my hands in horror as my nails curl into claws, my vision flickering on and off, like I'm going to black out from the pain.

I’m ripping out of my skin. (*Lobizona* 217-18)

Rather than her transformation being separated from her “rational” self, Manu’s transformation is an embodied experience characterized by a flickering liminal existence as she “rip[s] out of [her] skin” similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings on the serpent. Anzaldúa describes a similar fear and desire in seeking animality in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. After hearing stories that associated serpents with causing harm and being invasive to the body, Anzaldúa illustrates that entering into the serpent means to “acknowledge that [she has] a body, that [she is] a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul” (48). There is a sense of living between “fear and elation” within

Manu's and Anzaldúa's metamorphosis that is generative (Anzaldúa 48). The newness of Manu's powers creates a sense of horror as she "stare[s] at [her] hands in horror as [her] nails curl into claws" and despite the near blacking out, she gains a new form of communication immediately after the transformation: telepathy, in addition to her "new design" (*Lobizona* 17). I follow Franck's notion that we should not separate the two because of how the pluralistic mode offers a unique perspective.

Wolves of No World focuses on the minoritarian community of the Septimus who are oppressed in the human world but who also oppress those who do not conform like Manu and LGBTQIA youth. When persecuted by humans, the story of the "seventh son" was a folktale that was passed down from generation to generation in order to maintain the survival of those born to human families so that the secretly Septimus children could find their way home. This shows how folktales were utilized by a minoritarian community for survival; however, as time passes in the Septimus world, human literature is banned, censored, and rewritten to appear "appropriate" to Septimus life. In addition, Manu must maintain her distance from human society in order to survive, and her knowledge of human stories is considered dangerous. Thus, identity becomes policed and fraught, especially when Septimus that do not conform to the narrow binaries of existing do indeed exist. Calling out the binaries upheld in werewolf stories, Franck critiques teen werewolf stories that limit lycanthropy to reduced symbols of puberty because "using an animal to explore the creation of human identity during puberty is informed by an assumption of human superiority rather than equality" (166). Franck describes stories where the human side must triumph and suppress the wolf in order to demonstrate self

governance. While the Septimus government tries to maintain a similar binary, they are the oppressed that have become the oppressor. Manu's porousness and hybridity is condemned despite its resemblance to the land as "territories abroad are hybridized [...]-- they exist partly in this world, and partly in Lunaris [...] Flora is the Lunaris anchor for El Laberinto. She's rooted there but grows here" (*Lobizona* 141). Lunaris, the dimension that is only accessible during a full moon, is sacred and prior to Septimus law and policy, Septimus ancestors urge folks to return to Lunaris as they "realized that as children of two worlds, the only way to strike the balance of [Septimus] powers require is to honor [the] dual heritages" (*Lobizona* 161). Lunaris operates as a living, magical entity and physical space who communicates to its people physically, changing the landscape as one navigates; Tiago explains, "Lunaris knows where we want to go" (298). The language of Lunaris is everchanging, and it connects with the body, mind, and place at once which mirrors the everchanging state of Manu's body in the series. Similar to Franck's claim about lycanthropy as an opportunity to explore non-human identity, I suggest that the connection between Manu and Lunaris—how they are both everchanging, embodied, hybrid, and constantly learning from each other—creates an access point to empathize and communicate with the more-than-human. Towards the end of *Lobizona*, Lunaris tells Manu that she has two homes, promoting Manu a hybridization and pluralistic way of living that rejects and is in contrast to Septimus law. However, as will be discussed further at the end of the chapter, the freedom of coming from two places and of not fitting in remains an ambivalent future in the series.

Symbol of Change: Narratives of the “Perfect” Catalyst

In this way, Manu’s lycanthropy queers societal expectations of gender, sex, and sexuality, particularly in the Septimus world where she initially expected to belong. Just because Manu discovers her father’s septimus society does not mean that she is free—the strict patriarchal gender binary that posits a biological deterministic view on gender and sexuality renders Manu an outsider within a marginalized community. As previously mentioned, Septimus society conflates sex and gender, relying on narratives of replacement to keep the structure of werewolf associated with Septimo and bruja with Septima as they force the brujas to have value only based on heirs they can produce. In *Lobizona*, Manu’s lycanthropy makes her feel like the only outsider that exists within this already marginalized community. Here, Boffone and Herrera’s figuration of the outsider is key; in citing fictional texts such as *Gabi. a Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Saenz, Erika L. Sánchez’s *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, and others as containing outsider protagonists, Boffone and Herrera assert that in the world where Latinxs are mainstream, these protagonists “must navigate their communities as outsiders within an already marginalized community” exploring ““weirdos,” “nerds,” and other “taboo” identities” (4). I explore the undocumented youth, nerd, queer, and gender nonconforming identities within Latinx YA.

Between *Lobizona* and *Cazadora*, bruja characters like Zaybet, Manu, Cata, Saysa, and many others in the Coven—those who do not align with these strict sexuality and gender identities that the government deems normative—exist in the peripheries, and

the series demonstrates that Manu's pain is not hers alone. In *Cazadora*, the pain Saysa feels at being invisible for both her gender and queer sexuality is felt by her community and by Manu. She has been in a secret relationship with her bruja peer Cata, for years, and at the Coven, and Manu notices how comfortable the two are with their physical affection, stating how she can "read all over Saysa that she's found the true home she's been chasing her whole life" (*Cazadora* 193). Finding other outsiders within a marginalized community gives Saysa a sense of belonging that she feared she would never have, yet, her pain from all those years of hiding is bubbling to the surface. Saysa says:

I already know I have the same darkness that destroys some Jardineras—but I can't talk about it, because if I do, it'll surface. It's like this volcanic mass of rage in the pit of my stomach that's always on the brink of erupting. I know you think deep down I'm a good bruja, but I'm not! [...] the Coven is the only world I've visited that makes any sense to me [...] out there, I'll burst. (*Cazadora* 194).

At this moment, Saysa's pain from being an outsider within an already marginalized community begins to surface until she realizes she is afraid of it. Describing it akin to earthly elements of seismic shifts, fire, and destruction, it is necessary to note how her power can also serve the Coven for change as Moraga and Anzaldúa note that heat is needed to generate change. This narrative of the "good" jardinera she acknowledges splits possibilities of Septimus folks becomes the reason why Manu is a symbol of change for the doubly Outsider. It is a reason why Manu feels she must not just lie about being a human-werewolf hybrid but that she must "become a lie," a perfect symbol to

lead for change due to the already-rigid standards of the Septimus government and anti-miscegenation laws that some Coven members agree with (*Cazadora*, 195).

Narratives similar to the “good jardinera,” or good garden witch, plague characters like Manu, Saysa, and Yamila, and these narratives make it so that Manu’s unique lycanthropy breaks the logic and script of “the world is not ready for” which policy makers and the media appeal to in order to suppress progress even in revolution movements like the Coven. For some time, Manu is out about her lobizona status, but she remains secretive of her human-werewolf status at the request of Cata, Saysa, and Tiago who know that even as revolutionary as the Coven sets out to be, as a political movement, certain members are also hyperaware of the narratives their movement creates and that not everyone will agree or align her with positive change if the half-human part of her identity is released. Thus, Manu must be the “perfect” representative and symbol for change that is both palatable to the Coven and acceptable to some degree for mainstream society—it is another prison under the facade of autonomy for Manu, a similar prison that Yamila is a part of. Yamila is a high ranking *Cazadora*, or Septimus border patrol, in a predominantly lobizon career, and despite her career seeming like a feat, the narrative behind her career will forever bind her to what a bruja “can do.” She is exceptional, but only on the terms she is allowed to be. In *Lobizona*, Saysa, a self-proclaimed feminist, introduces Yamila as the “youngest Cazadora in history, and every time she breaks a record, she brings us all closer to change” (175). Like Manu, Yamila is forced to perform this “perfect” exception which is essentially limiting, or the alternative narrative for them would be deviancy. In order for Manu and Yamila to feel as if they have some sense of

autonomy, they are encouraged to negate parts of who they are that bring them closer to La Ladrone, the bad mythical deathbringer woman, or that upstage the men in their field; to thrive in a social world, they must accept the narratives created by dominant patriarchal society.

Politicians and the media are aware of the paradox as they weaponize the cautionary tale of “La Ladrone” to the public, a tale within the Septimus world similar to La Llorona in its intention to scare children and keep women in their place, only “La Ladrone” will bring the end of the world. This tale is similar to La Malinche because “La Ladrone” is used as a cautionary narrative about miscegenation and why societies should not trust women. It is told in order to “reinforce the border between Septimus and humans. A way of discouraging the births of hybrids” (*Cazadora* 196). The lore behind La Ladrone perpetuates the narrative that once a woman gains power, they will destroy the world through a version of miscegenation. Words are pushed together into this narrative tale against miscegenation and women gaining power while at the same time, language is denied to varied sexual and gender experiences as Zaybet tells Manu, “at least humans have words like *divorce* and *abortion*. We don't have those in our vocabulary. Or gay or lesbian or bisexual or queer or asexual” (*Cazadora* 246).

Moreover, the suspicion that La Ladrone creates for Manu upon her own body makes its way into intimate sexual encounters. Similar to La Llorona, La Malinche, and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Gloria Anzaldúa and Norma Alarcón theorize that these stories split women into virtuous and suspicious, creating a narrow myth of femme folks that promotes denying them of agency over their bodies; in turn, this expands the genealogy

the “outsider” women figures. In “A Re-vision Through Malintzin /or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object,” Alarcón writes about the male myth of Malintzin, or the consequences of propagating the tale of La Malinche as a symbol for world disorder, adding that:

Because the myth of Malintzin pervades not only male thought but ours too as it seeps into our own consciousness in the cradle through their eyes as well as our mothers', who are entrusted with the transmission of culture, we may come to believe that indeed our very sexuality condemns us to enslavement. An enslavement which is subsequently manifested in self-hatred. All we see is hatred of women. We must hate her too since love seems only possible through extreme virtue whose definition is at best slippery. (203)

I apply similar logic to how the story of La Ladrone is weaponized within the story, especially since Manu begins to believe it because there is no other documented instance of a human-werewolf hybrid except for one that resulted in execution and La Ladrone. The lack of documents makes it so that Manu sees herself in the tale of La Ladrone as inherently evil, a deathbringer, and someone that perhaps should not have control of her own future. Soon after she figures out she can deflect magic, an ability only La Ladrone can do according to the stories, Manu is reluctant to trust her body during a sexual encounter with Tiago. In an intimate sexual encounter with Tiago, Manu feels her transformation about to set in and suddenly “draw[s] away from him [...] pushing down the impulse [...] [she] flinch[es] away, afraid [she’ll] shift on contact” (187). Here, Manu treats the transformation as an impulse she is afraid of and one that must remain separate

in intimate moments. Alarcón writes, “the male myth of Malintzin is made to see betrayal first of all in her very sexuality, which makes it nearly impossible at any given moment to go beyond the vagina as the supreme site of evil until proven innocent by way of virginity or virtue, the most pawnable commodities around” (203). By pushing down the impulse, she rejects what is now a part of her sexuality and exploration. In contrast to the myth of Malintzin, or in Manu’s situation, the myth of La Ladrona, the way to understand her body is to refuse the separation she is attempting to reinforce.

Judgement Day: Guilty by the Court of Public Opinion

The domesticana gothic reveals how lycanthropy’s containment follows Manu into public spaces like the confession room, courts, and the court of public opinion; meanwhile, technology aids this process. To the Septimus government, the U.S. government, and the court of Septimus public opinion, Manu’s existence and whether she has the right to exist has been debated even before she steps into the courtroom. In *Cazadora*, the act of confession takes place on Juramento, a mountain that can be accessed anywhere, and one may decide if they want their confession public or private. Typically private, Manu has no choice but to publicize and broadcast hers since, in a tight knit community of the Septimus, “secrets are poison” (201). When Manu takes the path to Juramento, she notices that “everyone here is wearing some kind of hood or veil or hat [...] shame is the great equalizer” (202). In this case, Manu is meant to feel shame for her existence. Because she is a public symbol and turned monstrous, Manu is not afforded privacy, and her confession is rehearsed with the help of a team as they are aware of its implications. The place where she must confess contains “a couch facing a large mirror,

which by now [Manu] know[s] to be a camera. Yet the mirror is completely dark. There's a red button beside it that [she] assume[s] [she] must hit to begin" (205). Technologies underscore the performance of Manu's confession, rendering her hypervisible and consumable for an audience. Additionally, the Coven anticipates before Manu's arrival that there will be newscasts lined up to witness her confession. Manu's body and existence is on display, and although she consents to it as it is a last effort to feel free, her public confession is a rehearsed lie orchestrated by the Coven. Essentially, the public confession is a contained space where Manu can only perform in a way that elicits suspicion; she states her reason for rejecting a lie and rejecting her parents' offer of secrecy and escape: "Lying right now would be the same as accepting my parents' offer. It may feel different because the cage is emotional instead of physical, but I would still be crammed into a space not large enough to fit the full me" (215). The end result of which is a trial for justifying her existence.

In contrast, Lunar is accepts Manu fully. Moreover, the agency that Manu experiences through her discovering her lycanthropy is what connects her body to the cognitive natural world of lunar. Lunar exists in porousness. Saysa tells Manu, "[...]each of our territories abroad are hybridized, just like Kerana—they exist partly in this world, and partly in Lunar" and that "Flora is the Lunar anchor for El Laberinto" (*Lobizona* 141). Porousness, in this context, is mobilized as Anzaldúa's call to porous borders in order to understand the variety of experiences that Latinas undergo, and we can consider monster theory scholars such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen who write that a fearsome characteristic of the monster is how they do not regard borders or boundaries

alongside mestizaje. As Manu continues her journey to understand how she is defined, who defines her, and how her origin plays a part in all of this, she is reminded how porousness like Lunar is exists before the Septimus government defined any of it politically. Lunar, the magical realm that brujas and werewolves access once a month, rejects definition by others onto her. The landscape in the Septimus world, including Lunar, is made of the earth, air, fire, and water, and the natural world communicates with Manu to reveal its colonial, heteropatriarchal past that has been etched onto the landscape's body.

The QYLA Question—Are the Queer Kids Alright?

The ending of the *Wolves of No World* series invites an ambivalence as it moves towards change and resistance. As stated, Cristina Rhodes' aforementioned article "Imagining the Future: The (Im)Possibilities of Queerness in Two Latinx Speculative Young Adult Novels," Rhodes traces two speculative young adult novels with Queer characters and discovers that their endings are ambivalent and lean towards self-denial. Sure, not all endings for Queer kids have to read like fairytale endings, and this is not especially expected in texts that deal with difficult topics that translate into the real world such as physical violence, undocumented status, and family separation, which *Wolves of No World* does. However, like Rhodes notes, there should still remain hope for Queer kids within books where their age group makes them a part of the intended audience and since queer BIPOC representation in speculative literature continues to grow.

The ending of the *Wolves of No World* series keeps undocumented, queer, and gender nonconforming teens, including Manu, Saysa, and Cata, contained once again.

After her public trial, Manu is condemned to a life as a Cazadora who is allowed to exist in the Septimus world with no familial, friendly, or romantic connections; Saysa and Cata's relationship remains a secret until they are on a break by the end; Cata and Tiago announce their false heterosexual bruja/lobizon engagement so that he and Manu can have a secret romantic lobizon/lobozina relationship which is not allowed. These all spell out the question: Did we end in the same place the series started? Manu is once again trapped, only this time, her containment is in the Septimus world. Her punishment to serve the Cazadora profession stands in contrast to her dream of being part of a family. Serving as a Cazadora, or border patrol/ICE, means being sentenced to hunt down and surveil the way she was monitored and chased down by Cazadores and ICE. To add, she is no longer Manu, the undocumented human residing in the United States, rather, she is Manu, La Illegal. Bernardo, Cata's father and prosecutor, reminds her what the sentence means: "Your identity was ruled *illegal*. That means you remain *un*-documented. You only continue to breathe thanks to the mercy of the tribunal, but you do not belong" (*Cazadora* 388). In the court of Septimus law, she does not belong, and Bernardo's emphasis on the words "*illegal*" and "*un*-documented" cement that Manu is only allowed breath, a reduced form of living, by the tribunal whom she should be grateful towards. Her reduced form of life condemns and removes her from possibilities of living a fulfilling life with friends, family, and a path she chooses for herself.

Despite all this, I suggest that the shift in speaker to the queer bruja Cata might signify a tonal change of renewal and hope, albeit significantly limited. I bring attention to the shift of voice at the epilogue of *Cazadora* which is no longer Manu's but Cata's

where she recounts life after Manu and everyone joins the force. No longer in a relationship with Saysa, Cata is now publicly engaged to Tiago and forging a new revolutionary Coven movement, citing her mother's sneaky and secretive ways as inspiration. Her mother, Jazmin, the headmistress of the academy, was written in *Lobizona* as a bruja with self-involved ulterior motives, refusing to show her cards and play by the rules (to add, she does not accept Cata's sexuality). In the epilogue, Cata refers to adopting her mother's movement but with a different approach and methodology, claiming, "I sense a new ease in my steps, like I'm adopting Ma's glide-walk. But it's not confidence so much as caution. I feel like I'm racing through El Laberinto with a lit candle and trying to desperately keep its small flame alive" (403). In distinguishing Jazmin's walk of confidence that helps her take action to that of her own which is defined by caution, Cata signals to the audience that the revolution is not over. The caution is similar to Anzaldúa's facultad, or an "acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols" (61). Anzaldúa writes how those that develop la facultad are the outsiders, "those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different [...] the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign" as a survival tactic (61). La Facultad's proximity to fear initiates the crew away from innocence afforded normative childhood and moves them towards, in Audre Lorde's terms, transforming silence into language and action. This, coming from Cata in the epilogue, should set hope and inspiration, particularly within in 2021, the book's publication, when the rights of trans, queer, gender non-conforming, undocumented, and BIPOC children

are being stripped with anti-trans policies, executive orders, family separation, and hateful rhetoric being spread online and in-person by politicians and pundits. However, the message breeds ambivalence and brings to question the methodology: Does this mean that the fate of undocumented, queer, and gender non-conforming kids are restricted to play by the rules of the oppressors? To create change using the “Master’s Tools”, like Audre Lorde illustrates, is a doomed methodology, and for this reason, hope is limited in this text. I must also mention the aspect that the author, and several authors of undocumented youth literature, are not undocumented youth themselves, including Garber herself. There is a specific political matter here with representation and whose voices get heard.

Conclusion

Informed by these structural inequalities from existing in the human world as an undocumented BIPOC child, Manu, considered doubly an outsider due to her lycanthropy and undocumented status in the human world and due to her gender-queering lycanthropy and undocumented status in the Septimus world, is an empathetic outsider to the young adult audience as she is motivated by the reunification of her family which mobilizes her activism in *Cazadora* to stand up for queering familia. Highlighting youth activism, Jennifer Nájera’s *Learning to Lead: Undocumented Students Mobilizing Education* chronicles the ways that undocumented students of various ethnic backgrounds in Riverside, California utilize their education and personal experience to inform their advocacy work; in particular, their advocacy work is “rooted in intimate connections to their families and communities.” The activism that has intimate connection to family is

necessary for transformation; to this, I also extend feminism's insistence on including the nonhuman or more-than-human, such as animals and nature, in our formations of community. Coterminous with Cherrie Moraga and Richard T. Rodríguez's queering of the familia, Angel Daniel Matos cites the home—and to an extent, the family—as a contentious space for queer and BIPOC teens. He discusses how young Latinx and queer readers are confronted with nuclear family compositions in young adult literature that exclude their lived realities, thus limiting “the possibilities for collectivist, cooperation, and kinship beyond the scope of the home [...], making it increasingly difficult for people who didn't share genetic bonds to connect, cohabitate, and coexist” (188). Matos claims that this contradiction has made it necessary for young adult Latinx literature to outspokenly queer the notion of family to include various familial dynamics outside of a nuclear family composition. I find the application of the queer familia pertinent to Manu's social consciousness as she finds home and belonging within her friends Cata, Saysa, and Tiago where they can show outward support despite the systems in the human and Septimus world that negate their sexualities, gender expression, and undocumented statuses.

In the next chapter, containment and the familia become central to the analysis of work by Carribean Fragoza, Beatriz Cortez, and Helena Maria Viramontes. It asks: How else might Latina and Chicana authors and artists speculate familia even in geographic spaces of containment? I aim to explore temporality in these figurations as well as the trace of family and what happens when plants and time erode or work to redo such figurations?

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“There Comes a Time When the Sun is Defiant” : Ecologies and Domesticana Gothic in Space and Place

In a 2013 Documentary “Makers: Women Who Make America,” Sandra Cisneros elaborates on starting her draft for *The House on Mango Street* by witnessing place as a site of origin for discussing “feelings of unworthiness and shame to explore things [she] couldn’t talk about” (0:35:00). She continues to describe how she noticed a gap in how place, like the barrio and the home, were written about by Latino writers in a way that excluded women’s experiences, and by starting at place, she could write about “[feeling] trapped and frightened in the barrio” (0:38:00). The feelings of fright, unworthiness, and shame marked by enclosures is the site at which Cisneros discusses silence that is placed upon the body during childhood in the young adult novel *The House on Mango Street*, and it aligns with how author Carribean Fragoza and artist Beatriz Cortez have documented the liminal experience of Chicana childhood and its borders through speculative occurrences of metamorphosis and powerful martyr ghost characters, respectively. I extend the domesticana gothic’s landscape to incorporate how Chicana authors are interested in the grotesque parts of nature combined with the speculative.

I place “Ini Y Fati” by Carribean Fragoza beside Beatriz Cortez’s “Childhood Bedroom” and Helena Maria Viramontes’s “The Moths” to highlight how Chicana authors mobilize the speculative and natural world motifs to illustrate the way the strength and fragility that mentorship between generations of women and girls conjures in order to survive and endure patriarchal violence. By engaging with ecoGothic literary

criticism and the weird, I posit that domesticana gothic allows readers to configure place and the body in the narrative building journey of the Chicana child.

Theorizing Space, Place, and Nature

For this chapter, I am interested in speculative stories and images where adolescents emerge from childhood experiences and the symbolism of childhood through plant imagery. Mary Pat Brady writes that space is part of social processes, arguing that our everyday encounters with space are not just schematic but “highly affective” as the processes implicated in producing space also produces and shapes feelings, and to an extent, experiences (8). Doreen Massey highlights that space is highly dependent on our social relations and are not simply one dimensional things, arguing, “from the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood” (179). Brady and Massey emphasize the social processes evident in conceptualizations of space, and it is also important to center the body. In centering the body, Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga present “embodied space” as “a model for understanding the creation of place through spatial orientation, movement, and language” (2). So far, chapter one was focused on how Latinas navigate spaces that are implicated within institutions and that categorize bodies such as the U.S. public school classroom, the hospital, and the domestic sphere which is shaped by culture

and nation. Chapter two primarily centered the home as the space where young girls endure violence and hold each other by ritual and ofrenda-making. For chapter three, containment within the home and moving closer towards open landscape into magical worlds that may still contain was a prevalent theme. Therefore, it is necessary to move towards ecologies of space with consideration of the body and natural elements such as plants which, through ecoGothic and horror studies, pervade and refuse logics of containment. Following Brady, Low, and Lawrence-Zúñiga, the domesticana gothic turn towards the ecoGothic is necessary in order to understand how Latina and Chicana youth are impacted by the spaces that make up childhood memories. The role that plants play contrasts to the usage of architecture in these works and represents speculative insight to temporal disjunctions.

Situating Chicana Feminism and its Ecological Readings

Chicana feminist writings have long included the environment as part of their discussions of domesticity and towards the speculative. Gloria Anzaldúa's formations of the shadow-beast, as discussed in chapter three, elaborates on the monstrous feminine through images of animality thus dismantling the anthropocene that commonly centers the idea of man which scholar Sylvia Wynter identifies as the overrepresentation of man, or "ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" (260). Anzaldúa's ecofeminist writing in *Luz* makes reference to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri's structural model of the rhizome in theorizing the self in order to map out a

geographies of the self. Here, the self is made up of lived, material realities rooted in space and oriented by it, as Anzaldua writes:

...Cada uno somos una semillita del arbol de la Raza. Roots are embedded not only in the soil but also in the inner city asphalt and in the spirit, psyche, incorporeal ground of being. We're not just the individual or material arbol de la vida that is our life; we are also las cosas y gente que pasan a nuestros alrededores, whether there be concrete metropolis or the green environments.

[...] The places where I've lived have had an impact on my psyche, left a mark on every cell in my body. (68)

Her writing recognizes space as embodied, marking foliage and metropolitan environments as impacting the psyche and cell of the body; the inner city has as much value as the pastoral. Moreover, in 2013, *Landscapes of Writing in Chicano Literature* by I. Martín-Junquera was published, and it includes essays by scholars who analyze place and landscape in texts like Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, Josefina López's *Real Women Have Curves*, and *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya motivated by gaps in eco-criticism that exclude Chicanx literature. More recently, scholar Cordelia E. Barrera edited the anthology *We Are Nature Defending Itself: An Anthology of Women on Bodies, Borders, and Place* (2025) with Texas A&M University Press that brought together a canon of borders and landscapes from poets, storytellers, and essayists of various backgrounds including indigenous, Latinx, and African American contributors. My analysis is influenced by Martín-Junquera's approach to reading the ecologies in

Chicanx literary texts through locating an “ecofeminist desire to bring a change to the archaic and patriarchal vision of nature as a passive entity and to transform it into a living entity that breathes, feels, and suffers—an attempt to give agency to the landscape and enter into communication with it” (2). Ecofeminism is present within my approach to bring out Chicana feminist approaches to nature, and under the domesticana gothic, the grotesque and paradoxical parts of ecofeminism add to the transformation of nature from innocent and passive towards active but also ambivalent.

In addition to scholarly work, work by Chicana writers including Sandra Cisneros, Helena Maria Viramontes, and Norma E. Cantú have been analyzed for their depictions of place, landscape, gender, and slow violence’s effects on the Latinx and Chicanx body. As mentioned, Cisneros focus on the house and space of the neighborhood in *The House on Mango Street* (1983) and the arroyo that La Llorona haunts in the short story “Woman Hollering Creek” aligns with themes of the space that interact with gender, migration, and the border similar to Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus* and Norma E. Cantú’s autoethnographic vignette memoir *Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995). These seminal Chicana texts signify a childhood marked by physical and psychological borders where young girls’ distinct relationship between themselves and capitalist commodities create a unique environmental and bodily awareness. They ask and wonder how they will be or are already exploited for their gendered, laboring body. Linking back to Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* and Sonia Saldivar-Hull’s *Feminism on the Border*, a third world feminism that allows for the intersections between race, gender, sexuality on a transnational

communal level that acknowledges borders moves to highlight the psychic and physical struggles at the border that Chicanas aim to distinguish through the liminal figure of the child. I am interested in the liminality of metamorphosis and transformation within space and the child that the speculative can offer. Although *The Moths and Other Stories* has not been visualized through a speculative or gothic lens, Viramontes' work *Under the Feet of Jesus* has been analyzed for its speculative futurisms by authors like Kristy Ulibarri and David Vasquez as the novel "turns debates about environmental justice from a juridical framework to a framework that demands equity in unflinching, material terms" (Vasquez 9). In addition, Margarita T. Barceló analyzed various stories from *The Moths* theorizing tapestries of space-time to read urban and institutional spaces which has influenced the direction of this chapter. In aligning Viramontes's "The Moths", Beatriz Cortez's visual representations of childhood spaces, and "Ini y Fati" from *Eat the Mouth that Feeds You* (2021) by Carribean Fragoza, a text that has been described by writers like Myriam Gurba as "Chicana Gothic," I emphasize a Latina genealogy regarding how nature, architecture, and time operate in connection with borders including cultural borders, the border between life and death as well as childhood and adulthood.

Nature with a Past: The EcoGothic's Postcoloniality

It is necessary to approach the domesticana gothic lens through ecoGothic and plant horror approaches. In tracing the ecocritical origins of Romantic literature and Gothic literature to reveal dystopian visions, Andrew Smith and William Hughes define the ecoGothic as the ways in which literary critics move towards applying ecocriticism to

gothic texts, adding that an ecocritical lens “acknowledges a number of theoretical paradigms that help to critically reinvigorate debate about the class, gender and national identities that inhere within representations of the landscape” (4). The landscape within the gothic is present within its conventions, but at times, becomes watered down because of the convention that upholds proximity to Romanticism. Robert McKay and John Miller point to this oversight and highlight the importance of the application of ecocriticism to the gothic that Smith and Hughes uphold, arguing that where there is an assumption of innocence within the landscape, “the Gothic version of the world is queer, ambivalent, dirty, mutated and far less easily reduced to idealisations of unspoiled environments in which ‘nature’ often has a conservative social function as a ‘moral or psychic norm’, in Timothy Clark’s phrasing, imbued with colonial and patriarchal connotations” (3). In my previous chapter, I made connections between porous bodies of the werewolf and how nature’s mutability in Latinx literature casts a shadow to reveal nature’s colonial past. Similarly, in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga theorize multiple theses for how plants inhabit the monstrous as they exist in the background and encroach, move, and flourish in ways that reject boundaries. Keetley writes, “vegetal life becomes monstrous, in its propensity to grow, to flourish, to overcome (literally) what stands in its path,” noting how plant’s “pointless” excess is out of indifference (9). Moreover, Gary Farnell proposes the question, “What do plants want from us” to move toward a “plant-human dialectic of desire” that denies viewing “plants-as-Other” (187). In analyzing when and how plants speak to humans in film, Farnell points to the locus of desire that is speech to examine

how plants answer “What do plants want from us?” (187). Approaching the domesticana gothic with this question and the ecoGothic in mind will uncover how Central American artist and critic Beatriz Cortez and Chicana author Carribean Fragoza’s work puts a shape to the quotidian decay of childhood. In the case of ecoGothic, the terror or threat of what the unruly shape and destruction which nature is capable of looms; with plant horror, the uncanny vegetal takes over the human body and architecture, resists borders, and instills immobility. In the texts I analyze for this chapter, I point to the areas where manmade architecture and the natural world merge to reveal the temporal subjectivities of generations of women that suffer under patriarchy. Alongside domesticana and the female gothic, I suggest that applying the ecoGothic and plant horror approaches to domesticana gothic texts and by examining the role of nature and time within the story, we get closer to recognizing how domestic enclosures become grotesque when marked by the horrors of sexual and physical violence against women and girls within the home.

Martyrs and Plants: Latina Eco-Feminist Temporalities and the Weird

Growing up in a Mexican Catholic household, I recall the way that children hold a significant place within Catholic iconography such as Niño Jesús, Santo Niño del Cacahuatito (Holy Child of The Little Peanut), and even the regional tradition of dressing up a child as Saint Juan Diego. As a young girl, I was given a baby Jesus doll to care for as my own with dressing it up, praying to it, and keeping it polished. Stories of martyrs like Saint Maria Goretti, whose film portrayal I watched in catechism class, left me with

more questions than answers. Goretti was transformed into a saint when she was brutally sexually assaulted and murdered at age eleven by her neighbor. Hearing the story as a child myself haunted me, particularly at how it was taught in my catechism class as a story of forgiveness, redemption, and “respecting one’s body” so much that they are willing to die for it rather than for what it was: the unjust violence that young femme children are subjected to at the hands of people they know. The story stayed with me, especially after the documentary had presented bits of the girl’s hair and bone as treasured relics—today, a quick eBay search reveals that pieces of her scalp and hair continue to be sold around the world. Goretti’s story is not uncommon, and Carribean Fragoza’s short story “Ini y Fati” shows how stories of child martyrs are tied to the quotidian stories of children, specifically young girls, and that the violence they endure is the true horrific outcome—there is no holy and divine transformation like those depicted in renditions of these child martyr stories. “Ini y Fati,” a short story from Fragoza’s gothic short story collection *Eat the Mouth that Feeds You* (2021), is a story of decay that illustrates how the domesticana gothic creates a space for the intermingling of the environment, the weird, and spectrality which work in tandem to reveal material and psychological enclosures constructed by machismo and marianismo.

In “Ini y Fati,” Fragoza indexes a domesticana gothic by blending the weird, which borders on horrific, with the eco-gothic to emphasize the role of nature as a force and character of this story beside its companion, temporality. The story maintains a Chicana/Latina transnational perspective, moving between settings in rural, working-class Mexico and the United States and predominantly featuring the stories of young

Latinas and Chicanas with a focus on mothers and daughters. In this chapter, I focus my attention to the story “Ini y Fati” for its attention on girlhood and the gothic to streamline themes of the bildungsroman in my prior analyses. The short story is about the friendship between Fatima, a young mortal girl who goes by Fati, and Inocencia, the ghost of a child martyr who was killed by her father. Inocencia, or Ini, is based on Santa Inocencia, a child martyr housed in the Guadalajara Cathedral, and she performs a miracle by saving Fati after the mortal girl was struck by lightning. The child martyr is allowed to save anyone she wants and perform miracles for anyone in the world she chooses to help, and in this story, she forms a friendship with Fati, ultimately offering more assistance to protect the mortal girl.

Death Tells us the Same Story: Ecology, Death, and Gender in “Ini y Fati”

The connection between nature and Ini’s strange abilities and state stress the domesticana gothic’s ecological and domestic encroachments to represent the excess that refuses containment. Ini’s initial draw to Fati grew when she revived the girl from a lightning strike, a force of nature that impressed upon Fati because she was away from her violent home. Ini’s ability to reverse the lightning strike’s damage to Fati signifies that she manipulates both the passage of time and the lightning’s destructive force because one dead, Ini’s miracle reverses Fati to a state before the damage. Ini credits the rescue to her halo, another form of light, as it is Ini herself that is “encapsulated” by light via the halo (Fragoza 81). Crediting her rescue to her halo, while it could allude to her sainthood, I assert that we examine light as natural and neutral (meaning it takes no

sides). Light, in the story, has the ability to revive and destroy, and what actually killed Fati was her reason for being outside. Fati was fatally struck by lightning, but her reason for being outside in the first place was to avoid her home life and to play outdoors. In contrast, Ini's use of light is warm and comforting to Fati:

Fatima woke to an intense, warm light. She saw the light at first through her closed eyelids, saw the red glow of her illuminated membranes, as if a new bright day had risen around her. Slowly she blinked her eyes open, and indeed, the light was warm as it embraced her. (80).

Having been so close to death, the "illuminated membranes" point to this mortality as she is shifted to a "new bright day" (80). Moving from one source of light to the next, the light on Ini is inviting and warm in contrast to the lightning that struck Fati flat. Through light, Ini projects a sense of protection over Fati, despite Ini's seemingly young appearance and delapidated state of being:

Unexpectedly, [Ini] saw a version of herself in Fati that was so clear, it was as if she were watching herself, alive in this time. How strange that people and circumstances could remain so much the same after all the years had passed. [...]ini felt a great swelling desire to protect her. As their days of play continued, this need to shield Fati from a looming fate sharpened fiercely with her impetuous child's love, as deep as it was mercurial. (87)

In seeing herself in Fati, temporality takes on a different turn. For decades, Ini has been able to live in her young, dilapidated martyr body as a forever young girl as a result of the violence she did not survive. Now, she sees Fati, a young girl who is mortal, and Ini's desire to protect her stems from this unreality that "people and circumstances could remain so much the same after all the years had passed" (87). The writing here is playful in contrast to the dark realities of child abuse in both Ini and Fati's life. Fati destabilizes temporality in her sameness which makes the situation "strange." The protection that Ini has for Fati is child-like and parental all at once, characterized by a "great swelling desire" for Fati's "looming fate" that only one sees with age, and its "mercurial" nature or "impetuous child's love" that a younger sister might have for their older sibling. However, this mentor/mentee relationship is unlike Araceli and Marisol's from *Itza* which I discussed in chapter two because, in Ini's case, the mentee and "older sister" figure sister is dead—she is a ghost that is haunted as she haunts.

In the story, Ini is able to manipulate plants, and her control of the environment around her is characterized by the fact that she does not know why or how she has these abilities. Fati witnesses the other worldly beauty that Ini creates within nature:

[...]the thorny bush under which their dolls rested from their vigorous play suddenly bloomed with great purple flowers. Fatima gasped and watched in awe as buds appeared on the barren branches, swelling open to unravel their flesh petal, stretching delicate necks toward patches of sunlight that broke through the dense clouds. (83).

Described as a “magical bush,” this purple flower bush will later become the bed where the girls protect one another. Here, Ini creates buds where one presumes none can grow due to the “barren branches,” but who swell with “flesh petal,” a descriptor reminiscent of pregnancy that also mirrors her “swelling desire” to protect Fati (83). Earlier characterized as “heavy and shadowed” or “imposing” to the land, the sky, in this passage, is covered in dense clouds, and in spite of this, the purple flowers’ “delicate” necks break through it (79, 83). The sky is described similarly to the abusing fathers of the story often described as “imposing,” and thus, the dynamic of women and girls as the flowers that break through the misogynistic confines created by abusive fathers by way of the institution of family is clear here. It also foreshadows the offer Ini gives Fati which is to eradicate Fati’s father.

Sharing a creative and destructive force with nature, Ini embodies the weird as a result of years of witnessing abuse. In a study of the weird and the eerie, Mark Fisher describes weird as a “particular kind of perturbation” in addition to a “sensation of *wrongness*” (15). Fisher characterizes a black hole as “weird” because it bends time and space in a bizarre manner, yet it also belongs to our world. Likewise, Ini utilizes light and plays with Fati like any little girl would—she belongs to a misogynistic, violent world relatable to the one Fati lives in despite being centuries apart. As a sign of relatability, she tells Fati, “Inocencia is my real name. but you can call me Ini for short. It’s what my mother called me” (83). Ini’s unexplainable and mysterious yet remarkable existence lends to defining her through the weird because she defies the logic of linear cellular death that the Catholic religion follows: one lives on earth, one dies on earth, and one

goes to the “afterlife” to be judged before being sent to Heaven or to Hell. Instead, Ini is a ghost with more mobility and power over her environment than she ever had as a human in the flesh. At first, Fati is fascinated by Ini’s powers until the ghost starts hurting people, and she comes to find out what is actually hidden within Ini due to all her years witnessing violence. When Ini offers Fati the chance to kill the father, Fati appeals to a higher, patriarchal order, God, to inquire what God would think about it, and this angers Ini. Ini replies to the weirdness of her existence, stating, “[...] no God has ever talked to me. I’ve received no revelations. Except, of course, myself” (95). Destroying the link between what sets her apart from Fati (her powers), Ini takes agency for the both of them and claims: “I am what I am with no explanation at all, just like when I was a real girl, just like you. There is no explanation for any of it” (95). In refusing distinctions, Ini asserts that her extraordinary powers do not make her a special entity more worthy than Fati. Her powers and uses of her powers are influenced by the unchanging nature of time where she has witnessed the abuse of children and mothers. The fact that “there is no explanation for any of it” alludes to how there is no higher reason for the abuse that they endure which critiques people’s designation of Ini’s ascribed martyrdom. Although Ini has worshippers, they are mostly desperate people in abusive situations that believe and pray for her “gift” through miracles while the church continues to exploit her by touring her body around for all to see.

Effacement becomes a type of domestic enclosure within the story. For instance, Ini's body was so brutalized that it did not even make it; instead, her embodied vessel is a whitewashed, effaced version of herself:

Ini's body had been bludgeoned irreparably and not enough had remained for the pilgrims to gather around. Instead, a large doll had been made in her likeness, or that's what they claimed. [...] She was not blonde in life, nor did she have glossy curly locks. Her face was neither smooth nor fair. She'd been pockmarked and scratched, the color of clay. And she certainly did not have blue eyes, not even close. She remembers how dark they were, two polished stones. (86)

Sanctified by the worshippers, Ini's effacement from her "color of clay" to the "glossy curly locks" and face that was "smooth" and "fair" signals a colorism placed onto her and the idea of "innocence." In a study of enclosures and captivity, Mary Pat Brady defines how "innocence," in formations of the child, is often racialized as white. Ini's own eyes transformed from "two small polished stones" that "could protect her, like amulets, or like two tiny weapons" to eyes that were not hers. Her new physical appearance given to her by the worshippers is another act of violence, this time, an act of effacement. The act of effacement is mirrored by the Frankenstein-like appearance of the new martyr girl Ini visits who "lay unresponsive and unstained by blood, looking like a lousy papier-mache job. If she were strung up and beaten like a pinata, she'd be the most disappointing kind (86). Likening her to a piñata, an object that is beaten by people in celebration, Ini points to the martyr girl's sheer commonality by reading the placard and scoffing "What virgin

saint wasn't 'murdered by her own father?'" (86). The martyr girl is effaced twice—once by her father (despite her body being intact), and twice by the worshippers who sanctify the systemic issue of feminicide. In their difference states of death, their effacement is alike, and it is similar to the effacement Ini fears for Fati when she sees the mother worshippers:

It's hard to see the mothers behind their veils. They are sheilded, hidden, silenced by the fathers, whose voices echo in all the throats, choke up the hallways of the house with their reverberations so that even when they are not there, even in their absence, the walls are like an extension of their tyrannical bodies. (92)

The mothers' anonymity and specter-like existence through the veils of worship show how fathers silence the women until their patriarchal presence is "there, even in their absence" (92). The architecture of the house's harsh walls become a container and "extensions of their tyrannical bodies" as the women drown. While the physical structure of the home and its walls are meant to contain and safeguard, I suggest that the house, for Chicanas under the domesticana gothic, is a haunting space with specters as well as a space of resistance and care. M. Lukic describes what Gaston Bechelard calls the "spatial alveoli" or "spatial inscriptions that contain compressed time, or, in other words, memories" which he asserts are "the remaining slivers of good memories and/or traumas and pain that usually take shape of a variety of different occurrences (ghosts, demons, vampires, curses, madmen, etc.), now haunt the unfortunate occupants and force them to confront either their own past or the past of the surrounding spaces" (97). In doing so,

Fragoza identifies the mother as that locus for this as she writes, “What is a mother if not a frame to show you what you may become or what you must avoid?” (92). Ini’s liminal occupation as sister/protector troubles the linearity of this effacement as she resists it.

Suspended in a girlish and maternal role, Ini’s ability to protect occurs because of the effacement she fears for Fati that once happened to her mother. Effacement is what made Ini’s mother into a specter that Ini desired to remember. Described as a ghost, Ini recalls watching Fati’s mother in her domestic duties as her movements were “like a slow dance, as if she were underwater and sometimes coming up for air, craning her neck up to the light bulb, gasping” (93). Here, the water that is the “invisible current” of motherhood is harsh and keeps the mother down until she is at the bottom of the current and reaches for her child, also described as a “buoy” for the life-saving properties. Children as buoys reverses the protective role that mothers are meant to assume, evidenced by the final scene where the girls huddle in the purple flower bush:

They crawled under it and nestled in a bed of blossoms whose scent, both pungent and sweet with flowers in various states of decay, enveloped them [...] the insistent rain pushed through the web of branches to find them. It broke apart the dirt beneath their folded bodies and water streamed around them, pulling at their ankles. Ini and Fati held each other tightly, anchoring themselves with heads butted together. (97)

The flowers are both beautiful and tragically grotesque in their decay, and its enveloping of the girls demonstrates how nature protects the girls from the unforgiving sky’s

rainstorm. The water, similar to the water mentioned before, pushes, finds, imposes on the girls. In the middle of this scene:

The rain drenched Ini's robes and began to pull the wig from her porcelain head. Muddied, her satin shoes were no longer sky blue. Fati, made of solid flesh, muscle and bone, shielded Ini's small head beneath her chin. She pulled her little body against her own, so that Ini could curl onto her lap. She picked her up and cradled her in her arms, rocking her. She found the words to a lullaby she'd forgotten about and sang them to Ini until she fell asleep. (97)

Ini is fragile and falling apart as "the rain drenched Ini's robes and began to pull the wig from her porcelain head" and "muddied, her satin shoes were no longer sky blue" (97). The town's artificial presentation of what made Ini "perfect" is being washed away by the rain in a manner of cleansing. In contrast, it is Fati's embodied state "made of solid flesh, muscle and bone" that keeps Ini intact. In this passage, Ini becomes the infant as she is "cradled" in Fati's and sung to until she falls asleep. The music that comes from Fati possibly signifies a lullaby she was sung once herself, forgot, and now remembered, thus transporting Ini to a different past within this present storm. The sensation of simultaneously feeling older and younger at the same time through the support of a sibling reorients us in moments of necessity, particularly when one feels unseen to the rest of the world. Natural elements like the sky, plants, and rain are neutral forces that work in the story to reveal where change is needed to better support children.

Plants Eat the Room Alive: Encroachment and Transformation in Childhood Bedrooms in Beatriz Cortez's "Childhood Bedroom"

The unruly decay and growth of plants towards a gothic understanding of containment is prevalent in Los Angeles-based Salvadoran artist and cultural critic Beatriz Cortez's "Childhood Bedroom." The video clip is two minutes and thirty seconds long, and it depicts a time-lapsed static shot of plants growing, decaying, and knocking over nostalgic childhood items within a small, contained replica of the artist's childhood bedroom in El Salvador made using wood, glue, paper, cloth, and foamboard. Within this shot, there are two noticeable walls: one wall contains Pink Floyd posters including a poster of guitarist David Gilmour; on the opposite wall, there is a byzantine art-style portrait of a saint, a portrait of an unnamed man (presumably a family member) above a bookcase, and two attached shadow box backdrops that represent an open closet and slightly open bathroom. The only item slightly visible in the foreground is what appears to be a bed and a lamp as the entire video clip is covered in vegetation. A teddy bear is deliberately placed on top of the bed, and the lamp peaks through from the side.

The viewer is placed inside the room, an environment that feels in medias res, or possibly, at the end of a life. Marking the end, Keetley writes that a horror of vegetation is that it grows everywhere and anywhere, toppling and covering whatever is in its path, adding, "one of the hallmarks of apocalyptic landscapes, both visual and written, is the crumbling remnants of human culture—buildings, roads, art—overgrown with an assertive greenery, bound on taking back what it once owned and will own when we are

gone” (14). In the first seconds of the video clip, the vegetation in the room is contained to the horizon. The vegetation does not feel out of place—its placement seems deliberate as the bookcase is not covered, the frame of the bed is visible, and the teddy bear is neatly placed on top of the covered bed. All the places that the artist, as a child, stepped around and walked over or placed her body on each day and night are spots dense with vegetation. Therefore, it is like her steps and her body, her trace, spawned the vegetation in her absence as the most dense and visible vegetation is on top of the bed, in the closet, in the bathroom, and in front of the bookshelf. The destruction of the child’s bedroom does not occur until one minute into the clip, and by then, the vegetation grows until it knocks over the books and family portraits. Here, the vegetation breaks the horizon line, and by minute two, the vegetation becomes foreground rather than background, stretching into the camera until it wilts down in another passage of time. Keetly asserts, “plants exist as the absolute other [because] we are unable to “see” them; they seem to have a unique ability to strike us blind” (10). Lingering in the background, the jump to the foreground and its subsequent decay marks a point in the timelapse where the viewer is confronted with the end of the end of this childhood bedroom. A domesticana gothic lens that moves towards the ecofeminist allows us to align the containment of the plant “other” alongside a gendered containment of a young girl that is also “othered.” Thus, we can view the young girl and her containment through the growth and decay of the vegetation as it was here “all along” through the formative eighteen years of life.

The trace of the child is scattered, and the warm lighting of the last shot allows us to envision how the domestic space was a paradoxical environment for the vegetation.

Continuations of the clips show how the curtains on the right side was the only literal and figurative window for light and air, but the vegetation's containment within the miniature bedroom broke visual lines and shifted focal points. What does the shifting of focal points evoke? By building from Sylvia Wynter and Anibal Quijano, Kancey Cornejo defines "visual disobedience" as a "tactic of resistance within decolonial aesthetics—it is a defiance of both state repression and visual coloniality; it is an act of praxis and protest against colonial logics and toward the decolonization of art and knowledge" (9). The shifting of focal points caused by the growing vegetation represents a defiance that speaks to Cornejo's "visual disobedience" as it evokes a crossing of visual borders that Eurocentric aesthetics seeks to maintain. The subject of childhood here is an abstraction rooted and inseparable from its material reality as the replica that is the miniature is locked in time and space since it was the artist's childhood bedroom in El Salvador for the first eight years of life. Furthermore, the posters, portraits, and traces of the child's steps via the vegetation emphasize how this material reality of childhood is inseparable from the time lapse of its decay. The ecoGothic's insistence on locating colonization's trace combined with plant horror's indifference to architecture are portrayed within Cortez's portrayal of childhood through the bedroom space.

In addition, plants cover and they move where they must to maintain growth. If we view space according to Mary Pat Brady's associations with space as a social processes, childhood then becomes reflected with it becoming locked within a specific space and time that elicits a social processes of influential markers and identity formation included but not limited to band obsessions, teddy bears, and familial influences

including religious and familial iconography which are visible Cortez's miniature. The decay envisioned in this space through plants asks us to question how much of what we keep from childhood will remain under stressors, aging, and rebirth. Rebirth, for Latina and Chicana authors and artists, coincides with plants and transformations as evidenced in Helena Maria Viramontes's short story "The Moths" from her collection of the same title.

Semillas, Monsters, and Finding Flight: Chicana Ecofeminism in Helena Maria Viramontes's "The Moths"

"The Moths" is a short story from the collection "The Moths and Other Stories" by Helena Maria Viramontes published in 1995 by Arte Publico Press. The story follows a fourteen year-old girl who feels like she does not belong in her family for the ways that she does not follow her father's rules, religion, and social conventions of being a *mujercita* or a young woman. In an eco-feminist review of "The Moths," Imelda Martín-Junquera identifies that the main tenets of ecofeminism includes the critique of androcentrism and efforts to breaking the cycle of control over human reproduction; in addition, ecofeminism "cares about the conditions in which reproduction takes place, and explores the extent to which human inequality is based on these relations of reproduction and on how the female gender is exploited to obtain a profit" (42). Therefore, I follow Martín-Junquera in reading Abuelita Luna and the narrator not simply for their turn to alternative knowledges, which has been extensively studied, but for the ecofeminism and relationship to nature that the women form in order to become close to one another and to

heal from trauma resulting from gender impositions. I also turn to the language of space and place to make my observations for how the characters speculate new realities.

The narrator underscores the domesticana gothic's necessity for space as the child grapples with contradiction and feelings of monstrosity. Feeling like her body is excessive, the speaker's enunciation of her "bull hands" closely aligns with language that describes animality and monstrosity. She is ashamed of this, as this is opposite to how she describes her sisters as "pretty" and "nice" in addition to being capable of chores that are designated as appropriately feminine such as "hand[ling] the fineries of crocheting or embroidery," and they laugh at her bull hands "with their cute waterlike voices" (27). The sisters are restrained by adjectives and verbs like "nice," "pretty," and "handle" which all point to their role in perpetuating and being trapped by marianismo. Their "waterlike" voices are ghostly, and as a response, the narrator adds to this threat of effacement by weaponizing a brick in a sock. The brick represents an element of architecture or housebuilding, representing how the narrators and sisters are hurt by the home literally and figuratively as they hurt one another. The shadows of the violence within the home seeps into the brick she sneaks in her sock, an unassuming household object. In stories like *Itza*, the sisters hold onto each other as they survive, and in "The Moths," part of the contradiction of the domesticana gothic is that the sisters's insistence to be small creatures who follow their father's orders is done in order to ensure a type of survival available to them that also entraps them. Resorting to violence, the sisters urge the narrator to follow their father's orders of going to church or else "they were all going to kick the holy shit out of me" (29). Threats of violence are once again weaponized among

the sisters in order to keep the status quo, but it is also done to protect their sister from the father who is the enforcer of punishment. Understanding this contract, the narrator “stuffs” her feet into “black Easter shoes,” and the act of “stuffing” her feet, contorting and making herself smaller, indicates how survival within the home is predicated on containing the body and deflating the spirit until it “fits” (29).

On the other hand, Abuelita Luna’s home and practice of plant medicine bring to view methods of survival for Latinas and Chicanas by emphasizing the role of “making do” with the emotions that swirl uncertainty, death, and transition; death, in this case, is not to be feared and is instead, part of growth. In turn, this repositions the church’s intended purpose for dealing with death and illness, and instead highlights the patriarchal violence that is embedded within the church. The chapel, which is meant as a place and point of connection among parishioners, is austere and rather than being cradled, has a high ceiling, vastness, and coolness. The narrator recalls, “I had forgotten the vastness of these places, the coolness of the marble pillars and the frozen statues with blank eyes” (29). Instead of being a place to grow and transform, the static nature of the chapel is highlighted. While the chapel is empty, another space that is prominently featured in the story is Jay’s Market. Filled with commodities, the growth that this offers the narrator is empty as “the tomatoes were always soft and the cans of Campbells soups had rusted spots on them. There was dust on the tops of cereal boxes” (30). With the food deteriorating and near its expiration date, Jay’s Market does have what the narrator needs including “rubbing alcohol, five cans of chicken broth, a big bottle of Pine Sol” (30).

In contrast, Abuelita Luna's home demonstrates an excessive natural landscape that is encouraged to grow out of its confines rather than be stuck and deflated within structures. In a *rasquache* manner, Abuelita grows her plants in coffee cans, a repurposed commodity, and the narrator assists with her job to:

fill them with red clay from beneath her rose bushes, packing it softly, then making a perfect hole, four fingers round, to nest a sprouting avocado pit, or spidery sweet potatoes that Abuelita rooted in mayonnaise jars with toothpicks and daily water, or prickly chayotes that produced vines that twisted and wound all over her porch pillars, crawling up to the roof, up and over the roof, and down the other side, making her small brick house look like it was cradled within the vines that grew pear-shaped squashes ready for the pick, ready to be steamed with onions and cheese and butter. The roots would burst out of the rusted coffee cans and search for a place to connect. I would then feed the seedlings with water. (28)

As caretaker of the plants, the narrator is encouraged to build a structure and home for the plants with the intention that they grow within the soil that nurtures them. The "red clay" is from "beneath [Abuelita's] rose bushes" and the hole that is "four fingers round" allows there to be room to nest an already "sprouting avocado pit," "spidery sweet potatoes," and "prickly chayotes" which are all described for the ways that they extend themselves in abrasive yet necessary ways, similar to how the eco-gothic is depicted by its "queer, ambivalent, dirty, mutated" state (Smith and Hughes). Through its "spidery," "sprouting," and "prickliness," these growth patterns are unpredictable, transformative,

and yield results which “twist,” “round,” and “crawl” all over the architecture of Abuelita’s house until “the small house look[ed] like it was cradled” refuses to subject itself to a system of power that resembles a perpetual infantilization like that which *marianismo* subjects women to (Viramontes 29). In the end, the unpredictability of nature evokes speculation as it creates sustenance through the “pear-shaped squashes ready for the pick, ready to be steamed with onions and cheese and butter” (29). The “bursting” of the seeds within the coffee cans show how being uncontainable aids in searching for “a place to connect,” an attribute that the gothic aims to contain but that within Chicana feminist studies is framed as necessary for creating community (29). Moreover, “bursting” is once again referenced at the realization of Abuelita Luna’s death.

Viramontes writes:

There comes a time when the sun is defiant. Just about the time when moods change, inevitable seasons of a day, transitions from one color to another, that hour or minute or second when the sun is finally defeated, finally sinks into the realization that it cannot with all its power to heal or burn, exist forever, there comes an illumination where the sun and earth meet, a final burst of burning red orange fury reminding us that although endings are inevitable, they are necessary for rebirths, and when that time came, just when I switched on the light in the kitchen to open Abuelita's can of soup, it was probably then that she died. (31)

Here, the word “bursting” is now used to refer to the sun, and simultaneously, the earthly lifespan of Abuelita before the Earth, or the narrator, takes her place as healer and

mentor. I note the words “bursting,” “defiant,” and “fury” as words that connote a violence and refusal of containment. The sun’s relentlessness exhausts an energy in the face of death, an exchange between itself and the Earth placed in a passage where Abuelita Luna’s supposed death occurs and the narrator partakes in nurturing her. This transference of energy is important in a way that does not continue patriarchal power dimensions; instead, the energy and fury that burns and is “necessary for rebirths” is marked by nature’s cycle of transformation that invests itself in finding root and stemming outward to find connection.

Finally, the moths, insects that represent transformation and appear at Abuelita Luna’s death, embrace themes of energy and flight, turning death into a speculative realm. The room at the moment of death is nauseating and confined, filled with smells of vomit, Pine Sol, and cancer. Pine Sol, along with Fabuloso, typically used cleaner solution that I can attest as anecdotally Latinx and also mentioned in Vanessa Angélica Villarreal’s poem “Dissociative States” which is also about the passing of her grandmother who died of cancer, is a nostalgic market product used by the narrator to cover the illness. Illness excretes the body, and to let go of this energy, the narrator opens the windows and cleans “with the sacredness of a priest preparing his vestments, [she] unfolded[s] the towels one by one on [her] shoulders” (31). This ritualistic act as well as the act of opening the windows to open up the physical space stands in contrast to the enclosed and vast space of the church meant for ritual but only breeds violence within the home. In a final scene, the narrator mirrors birthing as she holds her dead grandmother in the bathtub, and the moths, “small gray ones that came from her soul and out through her

mouth fluttering to light, circling the single dull light bulb of the bathroom” (32). Here, insects come out from her soul as energy that belonged and made up this soul. Feelings of loneliness emerge as the moths do, and the narrator speculates life and transformation after, saying, “I wanted to go to where the moths were, stay with her and plant chayotes whose vines would crawl up her fingers and into the clouds” (32). Instead of a patriarchal version of heaven in the sky, the celestial and heavenly sky is rooted within the vines of the chayotes the narrator and the grandmother plant together. Moreover, life and death begin with the grandmother’s body whose energy has been exhausted. The moths, while being in the soul, also “eat the spirit up” thus creating a cannibalistic dimension where flesh, soul, and spirit are one within the grandmother (32). In the end, the narrator cries for generations of her family, including her grandmother, mother, and herself in the bathroom. The cries mirror the water in the tub that overflows, demonstrating how tears of sadness and grief from the death of the grandmother and recognition of the trauma represented in the narrator’s adolescence are necessary for new beginnings. Death emerges for Chicana writers as transformation, transference of energy, and requiring reverence

Conclusion

Carribean Fragoza, Beatriz Cortez, and Helena Maria Viramontes demonstrate how spaces prominent in childhood and adolescence are constructed under colonial logics of time and at times, invested in heteropatriarchal violence. Through uses of the ecoGothic, plants enable the magic of the ghost girl in Fragoza’s story, override the semblance of

childhood in Cortez's miniature, and invite ways to speculate the body outside of organized religion in Viramontes's story. Plants grow across these spaces of childhood and use its foliage to consume and protect it while also being that very thing leading to the growth of the adolescent.

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Conclusion: What We Can Do With Hauntings

Investigating the speculative in Latina and Chicana cultural and literary production provide us with room to discuss the specters and monsters that haunt everyday life rather than sidelining their meaning and homogenizing this cultural and literary production as “magical realism,” a legitimate term and category on its own whose specificity can also intersect with the elements of gothic and horror genres. Refusing the closure of these categories allows for room to combine the magical and personal in order to produce a result where politics can be examined within representations of childhood. Extending Brogan’s study on ghosts, we can continue to view ghosts as “go-betweens,” or “enigmatic transitional figure[s] moving between past and present, death and life, on culture and another,” capturing the spectral body as such is imperative to the way Chicana scholars have theorized the U.S. Latinx experience with theorizations like Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” (152). Where Brogan’s theory describes how ghosts that haunt stories by writers of color are immersed in the necessity to retell cultural collective hauntings that are not relegated to the individual but instead are relevant and felt across communities, the mestiza consciousness is a new consciousness created from this intense pain resulting from cultural clashes. Pain accumulates over generations and is transferred into the body, and this transference evokes possession. Texts like *Itza* and *The Haunting of the Alejandra* trace possession to demonstrate how the past gets locked into the body towards a “nightmarish repetition of the past” that is necessary to sit with as discomfort by way of pain and “ugliness” become modes to access autonomy that is fought for in the ghostly form. When something is ghostly, it sticks and refuses to vanish.

The pain from land dispossession and colonization maintains the vengeful spirit of La Ciguanaba as represented via the ghost of a woman named Soledad in Vanessa Montalban's *These Vengeful Wishes* (2025), a case study for this conclusion later on. Memory, for Brogan, becomes a saving movement where acts of narrative revision and translation function to digest the past and exorcize it; however, I am less interested in this digestion and exorcism and more interested in allowing oneself to be haunted by the source. Allowing to be haunted is at the heart of Latina speculative representations as it activates a way to process trauma and to heal from it.

In response to silences, stories of healing emerge from the lacunae of self expression by Latinas and Chicanas that forms through self-fashioning, variations of ghost stories, and reclamation of the monstrous. The silences at home deter women from speaking out, and they exist in other public structures as well. In Audre Lorde's "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Lorde denotes that we are up against the tyranny of silence and that every day, we wage war "with the forces of death, subtle and otherwise, conscious or not." For women of color, the forces of death can be slow and structural, encroaching into areas of human and more-than-human life. Rob Nixon theorizes "slow violence" as:

A violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular [...]. We need [...] to engage [...] a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but

rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales [...] we also need to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence. (2)

The violence that Nixon proposes we revisit is that which is not spectacular or explosive; instead, he suggests that we revisit violence that is structural, slow, and incremental as its repercussions “play out across a range of temporal scales” (2). By engaging with scales in chapter three and four, we consider how Latina speculative production generates various epistemologies that grapple with structural, slow, and incremental violence that is felt in the mindbodyspirit across generations. This pain wears us down, and it is scalarly felt in patriarchal structures from the grandmother to mother to the child and between siblings. Like in “Ini Y Fati,” the two girls may be separated by timelines as well as by flesh and spectral spirit, but their worries and risks remain the same. Ini remains a child, but her child body, a preservation effort by the community that attempts to treasure her as a martyr, is actually falling apart, and it is up to Fati to keep her together. Fati notices how Ini’s physical beauty is a facade held up by society’s maintenance of misogyny, and the horror is how quickly Ini is deteriorating into the same violence that put her in this position in the first place. We are left to wonder how Ini has powers, how her existence in perpetual childhood provides her a painful *facultad*, and in what ways does her perpetual childhood stemming from violence only begets more violence. In the face of this, Fati’s own actions of care allow us to hold (literally and psychically) the haunting of Ini and speculate beyond it.

My final thoughts rest on how we can further access hauntings and death narratives, a term coined by Kristy Ulibarri, through young protagonists. I am also interested in the environmental implications that allowing these hauntings to proliferate have on past, present, and future generations. I see my research moving towards explorations of young adult literature and engaging with science fiction genres. As an educator, my interest in young adult representations and young adult literature are informed by the ways I notice my students engaging in texts intended for their age range or intended for age ranges that they themselves are interested in teaching (as English majors, many of them are interested in teaching high school and pursuing teaching credentials). In doing so, my conclusion will be split into two parts: the first part will address my experience creating and teaching the courses “U.S. BIPOC Gothic Horror Novel” and “Latinx Death Narratives” at University of California, Riverside” to discuss why reading hauntings and deaths is critical to the time we are living in where governments are actively involved in the deleting of information and denying histories of people of color. I connect this with haunting because even as the government tries to deny these histories, delegitimized epistemologies and felt traces of these histories will remain and haunt us as they should not be forgotten.

Ghosts, Monsters, and Hauntings: Reflections on Teaching “U.S. BIPOC Gothic Horror Novel” and “Latinx Death Narratives” at University of California, Riverside

In Winter 2026, I had the privilege of teaching a course at University of California, Riverside’s English Department whose general topic is the Novel. When coming up with ideas of topics that I wanted to teach, I thought about my research interests in gothic and

horror literature, expression by artists and writers of color, and young adult representation. Together, these interests culminated into English 126: U.S. BIPOC Gothic Horror Novel where we spent 10 weeks exploring the ways that English studies was configuring gothic and horror genres by people of color in the twentieth century despite gothic's determination to stay within a particular time period and geography (18th century Europe). I was also interested in how students would discuss the overlaps between gothic and horror within the representations of young adult characters. To do this, we read *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987), *Curse of the ChupaCabra* by Rudolfo Anaya (2006), *The Only Good Indians* by Stephen Graham Jones (2020), *She is a Haunting* by Tang Thanh Tran (2023), and *These Vengeful Wishes* by Vanessa Montalban (2025). The timelines of these texts highlighted characters like eighteen year-old Denver (*Beloved*), the young students of Professor Rosa Medina (*ChupaCabra*), high schoolers Denorah and Nate (*The Only Good Indians*), high schooler Ceci (*These Vengeful Wishes*), and recent high school graduate Jade (*She is a Haunting*) as they grapple with the aftermath and ongoing pain of slavery, colonization, occupation, economic hardship, and imperialism that the generation before them endured and which they carry. Therefore, what became important were how these young characters grappled with the afterlives of pain and how they are able to speculate towards justice, antiracism, and embracing the collective in a manner that recognizes trauma instead of sensationalizing it or moving away from it when it calls for attention.

To kickstart the quarter, we grounded our readings in Kathleen Brogan's idea of "cultural haunting" to show how stories by writers of color foregrounded a community

rather than limiting haunting to the individual psyche of a person alongside Maisha Wester's reading "The Gothic in and as Race Theory" from *The Gothic and Theory* to discuss the ways writers of color construct and deconstruct Gothic conventions, particularly, the monster and ghost. Interested in the minority bodies, ghosts, and monsters, Wester identifies a genealogy of black writers that theorize the race through the Gothic to acknowledge how "racial production is a Gothic project" while at the same time accessing "the destabilizing power of the genre" (63). This contrasts to the conservative manner of which gothic and horror stories customarily succeed in containment and end in satisfactory closures rather than, Wester adds, how postcolonial Gothic and its iterations that discuss race "den[y] the satisfactory conclusions pervasive in the traditional Gothic" (63). Invested in these approaches, my students became interested in the young adults that knowingly or unknowingly carry the past's trauma, including its ghosts and monsters, until they find ways to co-exist with it or break it by confronting the patterns of violence rather than ignoring it. Denver's move towards engaging with her community, Jade's recognition of Cam's stolen life, Denorah's acknowledgement of Elk-Head Woman, and Ceci's willingness to empathize with Soledad's pain and give up her family were identified as unveiling the monster-making and ghost-making that these racial and colonial projects do to people of color.

As an instructor, it was important for me to utilize culturally responsive teaching pedagogies that bolster student experience in order for us to generate fruitful and sensitive discussion of topics still relevant today such as institutional racism, land dispossession, gender-based violence, and homophobia. I did this through having

students present on a part of the text of their choosing and design a question that they were interested in the class discussing for that session. This exercise allowed them to have ownership of the class. In a presentation, a student presenting on *She is a Haunting* related her “No-Sabo” experience to Jade’s own second generation immigrant experience. In *She is a Haunting*, Jade’s father fled from Vietnam, and he expresses feeling guilt over this despite the fact that he was a child when it all happened. In returning to Vietnam after his divorce, he does all that he can to prove to his siblings that the “sacrifice” of his mother was worth it, and it leads to the selling of the Villa to Americans with interests of turning it into a bed-and-breakfast. Jade’s father’s guilt and his disapproving of her queer sexuality distances him from Jade until Jade feels averse to connecting with him through language. In the story, Jade knows very little Vietnamese, and this begins to frustrate her once she realizes that is isn’t because she doesn’t want to learn (she does), the problem is the hurt and pain associated with her father and his immigrant guilt and subsequent homophobia towards her that was instilled from colonization. The student added how the “no-sabo” experience functions in a similar way. For context, the phrase “no-sabo” comes from “a malapropism of “no sé” or “I don’t know,” and it is an experience typically of U.S. Latinx children whose Spanish may be limited (Alvarado and Moreman). The experience puts U.S. Latinx children in a position where they feel rejected by both Anglo and Latinx cultural identities.

While I cannot speculate on the student’s specific experience with the “no-sabo” label, Alvarado and Moreman articulate the Latine girl experience within Latinidad as the “mija” experience wherein childhood is specifically tied to how one can closely express

Latinidad, Spanish being a method of doing so. Alvarado and Moreman write, “As the Latine girl is contextualized within her Latinidad as “mija,” she may or may not benefit from how others—both Latine and non-Latine—perceive and define her, and her ability to define herself may be limited by those within her elder-respecting, patriarchal context” (5). This mija experience lacks a recognition of the cultural loss that occurs within the Latine girl, a young person like *She is a Haunting*’s Jade who feels the weight of this loss as the child of immigrants and yet faces the pressures of assimilating at the same time which in turn, asks for us to face away from the pain that colonization brings us queer femme folks of color and towards erasure. The expression to go against this— to reclaim the term, speak unabashed mixtures of the tongue, practice rebuilding while refusing any culture of purity on either side—are daily refusals that force us to confront silences of mija culture that uphold sexist and homophobic frameworks. Thinking through “domesticana” and “gothic,” which both posit imperfect, uncomfortable mixtures of daily expressions of the repressed, illustrate that sitting with hauntings and their discomfort guide us toward rebuilding and healing as we endure the slow violence of racist, heteropatriarchal structures.

Similarly, youth was a focus of the class I taught at UC Riverside titled “Latinx Death Narratives,” a course that centered death as an access point following Kristy Ulibarri’s theorization of death and Achille Mbembe’s “death worlds.” We read Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Vanessa Villarreal’s *Beast Meridian*, Sandra Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek,” selections from Myriam Gurba’s *Painting Their Portraits in Winter*, and *La Llorona* (2019) by Jayro Bustamante as we mapped how

death became an access point for Latina writers to hint at ongoing and sustained methods of hauntings, chronic illness, and mental health issues stemming from generations of sexism, homophobia, and racism. Latina writers confronted death from birth because of their knowledge of these hauntings. Viramontes' writing of La Llorona and concern for reproductive harm through the thirteen year-old character Estrella (*Under the Feet of Jesus*) mirrors the coping mechanisms of Cleofilas ("Woman Hollering Creek") to identify with toxic relationships on television in a heteropatriarchal *mija* culture. The class ended with a creative project where a student had written a short story about the unjust death of a mother figure by the father which ended up being discovered by the daughter through hauntings. In the story, the father poisons the mother's paints, the very tools she uses for self-expression, and the student identifies the inspiration for this from the poisoning of Alejo in *Under the Feet of Jesus* whose own ambiguous demise ended with being sprayed with pesticides. The mother haunted the daughter using water to call to her, and in the end, when the death was discovered a femicide, the daughter yearned for rain. The rain, here, was theorized similarly to *Itza* as a heavy downpour of despair that, although it has the potential to drown, is welcomed to heal. In her rationale of the story, the student identified "unfinished business" as part of the creation of death worlds, situating death worlds as a ghostly matter. Both student examples of student discussion and outcome from my courses distinguish the embrace of discomfort, typically embodied in ghosts, as a stepping stone to healing. I note that the texts of inspiration (*She is a Haunting* and *Under the Feet of Jesus*) are conscious of interior and exterior spaces and the relationship between BIPOC femme protagonists and land.

Queering Spectrality: Seething Silences of Queer Chicane in the Familia

I will always be there.

When the silence is exhumed.

When the photographs are examined

I will be pictured smiling

among the siblings, parents,

nieces and nephews. [...]

I am the invisible son.

In the family photos

nothing appears out of character.

I smile as I serve my duty.

-Essex Hemphill, "Commitments"

Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows.

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (42)

The first time I heard a family member discuss queer identity was when he commented that if any of his kids were queer, he would hang them by the genitals. I understood early on that being queer in a Chicane household meant one was subject to threats of corrective sexual violence. Queerness, under machismo and marianismo, would elicit two responses: the first was violence and the second was effacement. Despite this, I knew we had queer relatives (I use queer here to encompass sexuality, identity, and gender expression), like my uncle who never married but whose lifelong roommate was a man, my relative whose gender expression did not align with their assigned gender and who would later be “saved” through conversion therapy (conversion therapy is now illegal in Mexico), and relatives I refuse to name for their safety who remain unmarried and reject dating out of fear of violence. I recognized this spectrality within the queer Chicane experience, a form of existing and at the same time, non-existing, to one’s family. During my time at graduate school, I feared going home, much like Gloria Anzaldúa’s “fear of going home,” knowing one will be deemed “unacceptable, faulty, damaged” by my Chicane, Catholic immigrant household (42). Turning to spectrality, I locate the demand of looking for ghosts within our familias. I open the essay with openly gay black American poet activist Essex Hemphill’s “Commitments,” a poem that depicts the silent presences gay children endure in heteropatriarchal families. Silences that imprint themselves, the absent space that is felt, are especially relevant to experiences by queers of color. Moreover, I suggest taking a spectral turn to discussing familia, the home, and queerness. Specters are seen and not seen, they represent alterity, and as referenced in *Specters of Marx*, are not to be “assimilated or negated (exorcised),” but instead, “lived

with, in an open, welcoming rationality” (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 33). Through the story of Amelio Robles, and poetry by Maya Chinchilla, we must take a spectral turn towards Latine queerness, and in turn, queer spectrality.

Queering Historiographies: The Familia as Locus for Knowledge

Locating ghosts within the familia means reorienting our ideas of death and historiography. Queer Latines know these stories *en secreto* (in secret), the rumors and whispers—the ghosts and afterlives of what did not make into photographs and obituaries. Marivel T. Danielson explored her own queer experience that she had to keep hidden: “I fed [my mother] lies while devouring my queer secrets. I had relationships, love, sex, joy, heartbreak, loss, trauma, and healing all over the world while my mama thought I was at home. Home was safety for her. For me, that same home was a place I performed.” In this case and many others, our fully lived experiences must be put away for the comfort of others while we fulfill our obligation and commitment to the family. We become invisible. Recounting personal experience is key here because much like Queer Chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and more recently, Vanessa Angélica Villarreal because in doing so, poets like Chinchilla aim to center life stories, or stories that are so often excluded from being seen as legitimized knowledge within academic institutions.

Personal stories are at the heart of Jotería studies. In “Jotería Studies, or the Political Is Personal,” published in the dossier section of the Spring 2014 issue of *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, Michael Hames-García illustrates how Jotería studies

emerges from insights of “the personal is political,” citing Audre Lorde (1984), Cherrie Moraga (1983), Adrienne Rich (1980), and Gloria Anzaldúa (2014). Hames-García writes, “our bodies and our selves are lived legacies of colonialism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism” (2014). Without our personal stories, a gap remains in queer theory. Sandra K. Soto examines this gap, adding how “Queer theorists’ engagement with queers of color, or with racial formation more broadly, is still too often contained in the tiny-font endnotes at the backs of books. These usually refer back to acknowledgments of “intersectionality” that often go something like this: “thanks to women of color we now know that we have to address the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation” (Soto, 2010). In writing and examining our own personal stories, we elucidate the complexities of these lived legacies.

I grew up with a type of Catholicism in a multigenerational Chicane immigrant household that strictly upheld an overt machismo and a covert marianismo that went so unmarked it was impossible to name. It meant that every child born with the label “nina” or “girl” centered their lives around serving men. Serving my grandfather a hot coffee became a privilege, unlacing my father’s work boots and helping him out of his socks became something my sisters and I looked forward to, and we felt good about eating last because my grandfather, father, uncles’, and brothers’ portions had to be measured out first in order to restore their precious energy. Serving men, and this particular masculinity specifically, can make nonbinary, transgender, femme and women identifying folks question the validity of our desire for a different gender expression or romantic desire apart from men. Our own desires do not exist.

Desires become shadows we push down. Anzaldúa uses the manifestation of the Shadow-Beast to suggest that when the desires we feel for women are denied, shadows collect as we “push the unacceptable parts into the shadows” (42). The act is automatic as we learn to survive in a heteropatriarchal household that reserves violence for those deemed “sexually deviant,” and while my grandfather was alive, this violence came with the Catholicism we practiced. We fear that this amalgamation of shadows “will be found out” and that “the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage” (42). The Shadow-Beast is manifested, a creature whose feelings are valid, but that machismo (and marianismo) has projected its “the reigning order of heterosexual males” in the form of “undershadow” (42). It is only when we confront that Shadow-Beast and have empathy and tenderness towards it that we can understand it. What I take from this embodied creature with “lidless serpent eyes” and “cold clammy moist hand” that “dra[gs] us underground, fangs bared and hissing” is that it is characteristically spectral, too (42). Its properties are shadows and undershadows, and it looms all through our lives or from the moment we recognize our sexualities and gender expressions do not conform to the heteropatriarchal familia. For this reason, I learned cooking and cleaning at a young age for the purpose of marriage since my mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers were married between the ages of 13 and 17. My grandfather warned me at fourteen: overcook the eggs and expect outrage from your husband.

I often reassured myself that my feelings were not real and that I would eventually marry a man and use the skills I learned to raise a family. I searched for relationships with men knowing that the Shadow-Beast within me featured a prominent undershadow

of machismo/marianismo which controlled my life. For years, I walked around like a ghost, knowing my romantic life was dead and wondering how I had no openly queer family members on either side of the border, but as Feccero writes, ghosts demand. Our experiences are not solitary ones. As previously mentioned, I knew the whispers and rumors of queer relatives, and I am grateful to those family members I have confided with who cannot come out for their own safety. I also want to point to broader Latine queer familia, our 2SLGBTQIA+ relatives that live across the border whose memories continue to be erased by examining the story of Amelio Robles Ávila.

Spectral Residue: The Story of Amelio Robles Ávila

When we theorize queerness by locating ghosts and spectral residue, we extend a possibility that historiography and the way we think about death and living needs to be queered. In a discussion of historiography and the spectral turn, Carla Freccero notes how queering the way we document history and revisit narratives is necessary for those voices that get silenced and dismembered in the process. One such example that I cite whose narrative must be revisited is that of Coronel Amelio Robles Ávila, the Mexican colonel whose memory has been rewritten to serve patriarchal ideologies of the Mexican Revolution.

Amelio Robles Ávila was born in 1889 in Guerrero and came from a land-owning, middle-class family at a time of wealth disparity. He lived his childhood as a girl and partook in activities like shooting and riding horses, which were all associated with masculinity at the time. In his adulthood, he joined Emiliano Zapata's popular agrarian

movement, a “rebellion of “campesinos” (poor peasants), who took up arms to defend their communal lands against the encroachments of privately owned haciendas (estates)” where he took on a masculine identity (Cano 181). While it was known for women to do this to avoid sexism and sexual violence, they typically went back to their feminine gender expressions. Robles, on the other hand, maintained his male identity. In life, Robles worked to sustain institutional, social, and personal ties that validated his male identity and was respected, honored, and addressed legally and politically as male.

I turn to Gabriela Cano’s writing on the memorialization of Robles after death. Cano describes how the ideological rhetoric of movements to preserve an image of the Mexican Revolution played a part in erasing Robles’ legacy after death; memorialization efforts feminized him, turning him into an ambiguous specter referred to as “Amelio” and “Amelia.” While Robles lived, the village of Xochipala had named a school in his honor using his lived name Coronel Amelio Robles. One such memorialization that Cano draws our attention to is how this very school stands hundred yards apart from a museum established after Robles’s death that honors the life of woman warrior Coronela Amelia Robles as well as variations of ballads that depict Robles as a woman, maintaining the binary of Zapatista male fighter and the feminine “Coronela” as a

reference to armed women in command of troops, idealized as figures who enjoyed a certain degree of personal autonomy and freedom, and yet, by remaining within the parameters of complementarity between masculine and feminine identities, did not threaten any upset to the established social gender order (189).

Therefore, Robles' memory maintains a social gender order that is interested in erasing any spaces for identities that did not fit anywhere in between or apart from the Zapatista / Coronela configurations. Chris E. Vargas notes how Robles did not fit into the feminized ideals that were constructed. I also want to recognize that bringing Robles into this discussion of queerness is a complicated process, and I stand with Vargas when he states: that Amelio Robles Ávila "never called himself trans" and that:

Just as the development of a feminist national narrative uses Robles in self-serving ways, so do I. I'm seeking to absorb him into a trans history that he may or may not have wanted to be included in. But since we're always remembering and memorializing from our own biased temporality, historical identification will always be a self-serving project. And I'm OK with that. (178)

Locating ghosts signifies that we notice the necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) of memory—of who gets remembered, who is erased, and who lives in that nebulous space between—and the collective involved in memory work. Feccero writes, "spectrality invokes collectivity, a collectivity of known or known" (337). I tell Robles's story to map how choosing to remember the lives of folks who lived lives outside the normative heteropatriarchal expression pushes a necessary collective solidarity to care for them even in death.

'We are Gathered Here Today to Get Through This Thing Called Life':

Remembering Pulse In Maya Chinchilla's Protest Poetry

I end this with an examination of Guatemalan-American poet Maya Chinchilla's "Church at Night," a poem that remembers the victims of the Pulse night club shooting that

occurred in 2016 in Orlando, Florida. The club was hosting a “Latin-themed” night, drawing in several Latine, openly and closeted queers of color, immigrant, and undocumented folx. In this poem, Chinchilla confronts the potential erasure and whitewashing of the lives lost as she reminds us of the vitality and solidarity that queers of color have built and continue to build in the face of homophobia and violence that wants to erase them.

Chinchilla renders the night club space as a space for protest and survival, turning the Pulse into an embodied specter that lives underground. She begins the poem with mourning of the souls lost: “en la Florida a flourish is missing the most colorful of its flowers / so many now without a Pulse” (3). The lowercase “pulse” of the heart that confirms if someone is alive is uppercase to relate to the club, not just as a location, but as a place of gathering, a “Church at Night” (3). References to a living body with a heartbeat and its simultaneous reference to the club are repeated. The subsequent lines “the beat remains while they beat our remains” refers to three different beats occurring: the heartbeat (related to the pulse/Pulse), the beat of the music playing while people dance, and the violence before and after death. To combat against this ongoing violence that is not new up to this point and which the queer community continues to fight against, she writes:

I think about our precious lives and our relationship to the night life
where we gossiped and made out and hungered to be looked at and wanted
and screamed the lyrics to our favorite songs, passed out condoms, flyers for
services [...] then cheered the girls and boys putting on a show (7)

The desire to live, connect, and keep each other safe is evident in the space of the club where one gossips, makes out, passes condoms and flyers for services—perhaps alluding to health, legal, and safety resources that the queer community, especially queer of color, who are vulnerable due to homophobia and racism, need to know about to keep themselves safe. These efforts to maintain survival contrast the gun violence that would unjustly meet the space in 2016. It begs the question: as queer people, we do what we can to protect one another, but how can we protect ourselves against gun violence and homophobia in the U.S.? Efforts to rebuild in the aftermath would continue by the hands of the queer community as two violences occur: the initial act of gun violence and the victim-blaming that takes place after hate crimes against LGBTQIA+ people are perpetrated.

Moreover, Chinchilla preserves the memory of the victims from those that want to “play smear the queer” or even those who “mean well” but do not take action, those who show false empathy for “political gain,” mocking the phrase “*our thoughts and prayers but nothing else / are with you!*” The phrase is performative, and it is what maintains a complacency in gun violence rather than offering any real help or lasting change. In part 2, she identifies the horror that the victims were met with:

not that your death might be your coming-out story
or that your last selfie would be used to identify you
by family across the borders who loved you and depended on you
because documents even matter in the afterlife (3)

The verse acknowledges the varied experiences of the victims, including those who might not have even had the opportunity to come out as well as folx who mattered to friends and family on both sides of the border. The focus on documents such as the selfie, a self-produced document of identification, and possible allusion to documents that mark citizenship or resident status shape the transition between life and death and reveal the bureaucratic way of dealing with death and memory. In response, she cites Stone Wall (“a night out in the open because others / had danced, defied, and rioted), and brings her body to mourning:

When I heard your names I could barely catch my breath:

The Anthonys, The Frankys, The Jean Carlos, The Amandas, The Martins,

The Luis-es, The Mercedes, The Marisoles, The Enriques,

Brown boys, grown men, girls, and women floating on the gender spectrum [...]

Trans girls, maricones, drag queens, club kids lightning on the dance floor [...]

Puerto Ricans, Mexican, Salvadorans, Afro-Latinos (5).

The use of phrasing like “The Anthonys” signals a familiarity to people we have in our lives. Chinchilla illustrates a solidarity across sexualities, gender expressions, and racial/ethnic Latine identities. It is in naming that Chinchilla brings communities together for the memories of those lost. This is followed by a plea to action and to remember:

I want action instead of wishes

Don’t whitewash this story

I need your prayers and thoughts to get more specific

And start asking why

Turning from “we” and “our” collective pronouns, the “I” is rendered towards the plea to “you,” flipping the outsider/insider role and advising those outside of the community to take this tragedy seriously, particularly those who have a political authority. The church is where “prayers and thoughts” are associated with, but under a political party that prioritizes Christianity but not the lives of others, Chinchilla’s plea for the “prayers and thoughts to get more specific” highlights hypocrisy.

Finally, Chinchilla asks for the story not to be whitewashed as evidenced through her relation to the victims throughout the poem for their race, ethnicity, and social location which mattered to their lived experiences and how they walked through the world. She writes “we’re tired of mourning brown kids, shot by entitled pigs” and ends with a call to resist and keep fighting and dancing:

Our job, to keep the beat going,
Cause the pulse never stopped,
Finding love in hopeless places
We’re tired of being so resilient
Pero, love beats here. (8)

In the face of violence, the pulse returns as it “never stopped” and the sounds of the “beat going” creates an image of rebellion in “hopeless places” to highlight the resilience of the queer community.

To end, I wish to repeat Chinchilla’s words: “erasure revictimizes” (7). Erasure can occur before death and most often does to queer people. Locating ghosts signifies that we notice the politics of care involved in memory work.

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Afterword: Border Futurisms and the Ghosts of the Southwest: UndocuYouth Feminism in Latinx Speculative Young Adult Literature

As a Chicana, I grew up aware of the fluid migrating patterns in flux—I lived with tias, tios, and cousins that crossed back and forth across borders, showing me how migration was never stagnant. Some crossed for work to send back remittances until they went back, others stayed, maintaining contact with siblings and making promises to help them in the future. My Mexican grandfather, a former Bracero, moved between Mexico and California to send remittances. After his Bracero years, he returned to Mexico, married my underage grandmother (against her will), and fathered children with her. Taking my father, a young boy then, with them, my grandparents attempted to settle in Paramount, California, until one day, my grandfather was deported. I heard this story as a young girl, but after asking for permission to tell the story for this essay, my father recalls how it all felt—as a young boy, he knew exactly what my grandfather’s detainment and deportation meant. The deportation meant my father had to move back to Mexico after having spent his formative learning years in what were essentially segregated mobile classrooms for English learners and enduring physical punishment for not being able to complete tasks. Moving back meant having to feel like an outsider once again and relearn Spanish. When his family went back to Mexico, the outsider feeling did not go away—instead, it doubled. Teachers physically punished him for underachieving in class, so he disengaged from school, turned to work, and returned to the U.S. shortly thereafter. He felt alien in both lands.

Recognizing my father’s Latinx migrant experience, I turn to how Alex Hernández writes about the Latinx experience in the introduction to *Speculative Fiction*

for Dreamers: A Latinx Anthology as he relates being Latinx to a speculative way of existing—one that blends science fiction, fantasy, and horror to describe how “we live speculative fiction lives” as we “wear fluid speculative bodies to function in different, potentially hostile environments.” I tell my father’s experience with deportation and feeling like an outsider during a time when areas in Los Angeles County, including Paramount, Downey, Pico Rivera, and Bell, are being raided by ICE agents in a mass deportation and militarization effort by President Donald Trump in June 2025 targeting democratic-controlled cities. After ICE raided a Santa Fe Springs swap meet, Home Depots, and several carwashes in Downey, small businesses are temporarily closing for fear of ICE raids and day laborers are staying home; many undocumented folks and Latinx folks, especially those that work manual labor jobs and domestic care, feel uneasy as the times feel apocalyptic.

My father was a boy when he survived the horror of his family being separated and uprooted. Anthologies like *Altermundos* (2017) catalog the ways in which Latinx authors engage in the speculative; however, they gloss over how central children are to these “apocalyptic nightmare[s].” Similarly, anthologies like *Voices of Resistance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Chican@ Children's Literature* (2017) center Chican@ literature while *Alt Kid Lit: What Children's Literature Might Be* (2024) discusses children’s speculative literature; however, both texts characterize the topics in a way that treats Latinx children’s literature and speculative children’s literature as separate discussions. I assert that there must be room made specifically for how Latinx children’s literature engages with the speculative by tracing nation-building in Latinx young adult

fiction texts *Sanctuary* (2020), *The Last Cuentista* (2021), and *Wolves of No World Book* series. Authors like Paola Mendoza, Abby Sher (does not identify as Latina), and Donna Barba Higuera writes for the children who also witness and experience the violent, xenophobic and racist rhetoric of anti-immigration U.S. policy. Through youth protagonists and Chicana feminist action, Mendoza and Sher's *Sanctuary* and Higuera's *The Last Cuentista* examine the project of nation-building and the othering processes that migrants undergo to sustain this harmful project. The youth protagonists of these texts presence Latinx, undocumented, migrant bodies in the face of technological advancements and ideologies that aim to erase and silence these histories.

Border Futurisms: Children's Speculative Literature and Youth Activism

My work builds on BIPOC feminist scholarship and global futurisms that recognize the typically invisibilized presence of migrants as well as Latinx ancestral knowledge that challenges white supremacist notions of the future. Concepts such as Taryne Taylor's "co-futurisms" and Catherine S. Ramirez's "Chicanafuturism" underpin my approaches to Latinx youth speculative fiction by presencing undocumented, migrant folx and reading BIPOC communities' relationship to technology. Taryne Taylor locates BIPOC voices within speculative fiction by exploring co-futurisms as a movement that secures inclusive futures; these futures include contemporary and past writers of color to formulate a body of work that features Afrofuturisms, Indigenous Futurisms, Latinx Futurisms, Asian Futurisms, and Gulf/Middle Eastern Futurisms. Co-futurisms inspect the legacies of colonization and imperialism to reveal "modes that remind us that we belong in the future and of the importance of recovering our often suppressed pasts,

aesthetics that coalesce these visions under a single, diverse umbrella” (Taylor 1). Taylor illustrates the tenants of co-futurisms, particularly Latinx futurisms, to include discussions of indigeneity and blackness that may be foreclosed in discussions of Latinx diaspora (4). Moreover, scholar Catherine S. Ramirez locates Chicanafuturism, a movement within Latinx futurisms, that is indebted to Afrofuturism, or the subgenre turned movement coined in the 1990s by thinkers like Samuel R. Delany, Tricia Rose, Mark Dery, Kodwo Eshun, and Alondra Nelson that works to presence black folks in the future as well as to “contest white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy and to emphasize belonging” (Taylor 2). In probing Latinx speculative lives through her term “Chicanafuturism,” Catherine S. Ramirez asserts that:

Chicanafuturism explores the ways that new and everyday technologies, including their detritus, transform Mexican American life and culture. It questions the promises of science, technology, and humanism for Chicanas, Chicanos, and other people of color. And like Afrofuturism, which reflects diasporic experience, Chicanafuturism articulates colonial and postcolonial histories of indigenismo, mestizaje, hegemony, and survival. (187)

For Ramirez, Chicanafuturism defamiliarizes what is familiar as Chicanafuturists utilize science and technology tropes and images to challenge sexism, racism, and I add, homophobia and xenophobia, that “exclude Chicanas and Chicanos from visions of the future” (189). I suggest reading further into how these “visions of the future” in mainstream media, which are exclusionary and hinge on racist, ageist, sexist assumptions, are critiqued in young adult literature that feature Latinx feminist leads. The

interconnectedness of BIPOC experiences of past apocalypses becomes a site of imagining post-apocalyptic worlds. All this is evident in *The Last Cuentista*'s Petra who is invested in the indigenous rooted practices and storytelling of her grandmother Lita which leads her to reject devaluation of human, animal, and plant life; moreover, *Sanctuary*'s Vali calls for the urgency of migrant community ties across race/ethnic lines at a time when technology has been weaponized to uphold biological deterministic ideas of citizenship that promotes the extermination of BIPOC migrant communities as well as the destruction of land. The protagonists in these speculative moments stand up for the existence of Othered peoples against national and technological silencing.

I am interested in examining the child's relationship to land during moments where land is viewed for what can be extracted from it, a viewpoint that, under neoliberalism, treats BIPOC and non-normative bodies as disposable. The teens in the three young adult novels value land as a family member, and therefore, their activism rejects scalar views of the landscape wherein extraction of the environmental landscape, according to the State and the elite few, is the logical thing to do. To explore this idea, Mary Pat Brady's theorizations of the scalar in relation to the child figure in captivity alongside Kristy Ulibarri's analysis of market violence are important to my readings of *The Last Cuentista* and *Sanctuary*. My father's personal history of family separation as well as the family separations that occur in all three novels relates to the ways in which Mary Pat Brady theorizes family separation as captivity since "the dissolution of kin relations functions within a relay that presumes multiple forms of captivity" that "has long been at the heart of US racializing labor practices" (2). The child is center for Mary

Pat Brady, and I build upon her examination of the child figure in young adult literature for it can do for the queer the family unit. By analyzing how sixteenth century Spanish thinkers deployed scale to ensure a “monoworld” empire that hierarchized people, land, and animals, Brady emphasizes how scale is mobilized for empire through the use of borders, binaries, and scalar rhetoric by anti-immigrant politicians. The figure of the child is ensnared in the middle of it, and for Brady, the child of color is ousted from the privilege of childhood. In a discussion of child and childhood, Brady traces a line distinguishing the idea of the child versus the privilege of childhood constructed for a liberal republic. Under thinkers like Locke and Rousseau, Brady discusses how childhood is constructed for a liberal republic, linking dependence and an inability to self-govern or participate in government. For Brady, childhood is marked by innocence during the Romantic literary period which soon becomes a privileged, temporal state for the white child that goes onto become the rational, propertied adult.

Noticing how Romantic poets like William Wordsworth leaned on Locke and Rousseau’s definition of childhood that hinges on dependence and vulnerable to corruption, Brady writes, “childhood was then understood not as innocent but as innocence itself; not as a symbol of innocence but as its embodiment” (7). However, this formation of childhood was marked as white as BIPOC children were “libeled as unfeeling, non-innocent, non-children” (7). Freedom, then, is tied to mobility because in order to maintain freedom and movement of goods for the benefit of the elite, BIPOC folks must be rendered children without the privilege of childhood as they are surveilled, captured, and enclosed from movement. Similarly, Kristy Ulibarri builds on Achille

Mbembe's theorization of death-worlds and the living dead to theorize how the U.S. runs on a neoliberal, capitalist economy that prioritizes profits over people, and in order to maintain this, the state performs border surveillance and participates in games of enterprise and security to mask the "market violence" it commits, or the violent demands and displacement of communities of color "in the name of free exchange" which only "reinforces state-sanctioned border violence in the name of citizenship" (19). Ulibarri writes:

Distributions of death and violence, then, signal how the social order reproduces itself through uneven distribution, where populations are organized by us/them, by the haves/havenots, by those who matter and those who do not, and by those who may live and those who must die. By foregrounding death, we see how the economy is not sustaining human life but creating more and more specialized forms of death-in-life. (10)

Ulibarri points to the uneven distribution of death and violence and to how "the desire for cheap, disposable labor and for free flows of capital in the United States facilitates the fortification of national borders" (14). In other words, capital is allowed to flow, but in order to do so, the cost are the lives, labor, and displacement of BIPOC communities. This, I add, coincides with Brady's definition of how scale and captivity are used to secure empire alongside rendering BIPOC communities as perpetual children that are unruly and unfit to govern while robbing BIPOC children from childhoods.

Brady emphasizes how structures like the criminal justice system, health care systems, and educational system create an illusory equality for children of color when in

reality, the United States has reinforced differential treatments: “Although children of color have been incrementally granted access to a romantic vision of childhood, complete with some semblance of guarantees to education and health care, such access has been carefully hedged by larger racial projects that produce suspicion and thereby suspend childhood for African American, Latinx, and indigenous children” (9). Teen protagonists, Petra and Vali are robbed of childhoods from the start—Petra’s opportunity to live out a childhood on Earth with her kid brother and parents is ripped from her once by natural disaster and a second time by the Collective who separated the family via time capsules; Vali must live in fear everyday as an undocumented teen due to the government’s biologically deterministic construct of citizenship in addition to the destruction of the U.S.’s environment that continuously breeds displacement; in my third chapter, we can relate this to Manu from *Wolves of No World* who lives in a state of non-existence on both Earth and the magical world Lunaris because, if her undocumented status is revealed, she may face death. In their respective texts, these protagonists push for a queering of the familia to include the environment as the only way to overcome the capitalist, racist, xenophobic and homophobic devaluation of life.

The Last Frontier: Challenging National Narrative Through the Power of Storytelling in Higuera’s *The Last Cuentista*

The Last Cuentista starts in future Santa Fe, New Mexico where Petra Peña is a thirteen year-old girl who lives on Earth with her scientist parents and little brother, Javier. Days before a comet is set to hit Earth, her family is among the few selected to board a

spaceship meant to restart civilization. The family is put into stasis using pods that preserve the individual's mindbody with equipment that can download or delete memories. During their stasis, a group called the Collective takes power and rewrites human history and stories. To combat this erasure, Ben, one of the ship's monitors, refrains from deleting Petra's memories and, instead, stores the world's stories in Petra's mind. However, when she is pulled from stasis by the Collective to assist in a mission to find life on a new planet, Petra must pretend her mind was wiped like the rest of Earth's remaining children, the Zetas. Her new mission is twofold: to make sure the Collective does not genocide a planet to colonize it, and to ensure the survival of her grandmother's *cuentos* along with the rest of the world's stories.

By beginning *The Last Cuentista* in the Southwest, Donna Barba Higuera resurrects the ghosts of Manifest Destiny to reveal the nation-building project that is space colonization; this, in turn, informs Petra's activism to cherish all life. Alicia Gaspar de Alba describes Manifest Destiny:

Manifest Destiny, particularly as enacted by the nineteenth century Anglo-American pioneers that migrated from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboard in manifestation of their God-given right and destiny to rule the continent, is an American creation story, the prime nation-making narrative or cultural myth, of the United States. (97)

More than a cultural myth, Gaspar de Alba notes the direct policy influence and use of Manifest Destiny to justify "raping, pillaging, plundering, and claiming ownership of the land" (97). In 1848, the United States claimed ownership of California, Arizona,

Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Nevada. Petra's family is from New Mexico, and they travel to Colorado because that is where the space station is located. Colorado becomes the literal start of the new future as "the shuttle from Santa Fe to the launch site in the San Juan National Forest near Durango takes less than two hours" (6). Teenage Petra, her brother, Javier, and their university-trained scientist parents are selected for survival in the ship, and I suggest this is because the nation deems the parents' skills "valuable" while society has constructed a link between youth and futurity as representative of carrying the nation's future. On the other hand, Lita, Petra's grandmother, is not selected to survive and is rejected a spot on the ship. Lita is an older woman, and being older, as we will see with aging Javier, is not considered useful or appropriate for an "efficient" future. Additionally, Lita is characterized as a storyteller and curandera that incorporates the land, storytelling, and meditation in healing rituals. She knows much about the land like Petra's parents, but her knowledge does not come from "officially recognized" routes of knowledge like the university. Unlike Petra's parents, her experiential knowledge is not considered, so she is left to die like many others; thus, choosing who goes on the ship and who does not is a part of the nation-building project, or how Achille Mbembe describes through sovereignty where "to be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (77). Petra does not feel right leaving, expressing how "it feels wrong to be sneaking off Earth while so many are left behind" and even feels sorry for the animals. The young reader sees how Petra's sense of belonging is not to a nation, but to the Southwest landscape as she expresses guilt in leaving her relatives, the birds, and

the rabbits, behind. To Petra, the landscape and the animals are her life, family, and community. She asks herself difficult questions to avoid simply accepting the outcome, “how did my family make the cutoff? How did those government politicians choose? What if Mom and Dad had been older?” (7). Rather than automatically accepting that only this part of her family would be included in the future, she questions how their humanity, age, and status contributes to the nation-building project while part of her family, including the animals, her grandmother, and her community, are left out in order to maintain the cultural myth of Manifest Destiny in space.

Petra’s activism relies on the significance of experiential, embodied knowledge by connecting memory to the land and presencing the land as a living organism in the future. Through Lita’s generational plant knowledge, Petra becomes a bridge for the preservation of land knowledge in order to prevent extraction as a facet of futurity.

Petra’s role in the future as botany and geology expert has been decided by the ship who downloads books her parents chose into her brain while she is unconscious. The program “En Cognito”, or downloadable cognizance, consists of “feeding” and “downloading” information to her brain about plants; moreover, downloading is an impersonal process that is efficient and requires no experience. However, we learn that most of Petra’s cherished plant knowledge that helps her question the Collective’s nation-building project comes from the memories between herself and her father. She recalls searching for stones for her father’s rosary as one major experience—an experience where physicality, touching each stone, was the learning point. In this memory, the men next to Petra and her father extract “buckets of mixed rocks” in an effort to maximize their time in finding

monetarily valuable stones like turquoise, Petra's father tells her, "you need to feel the dirt. Sense when it will give you a gift. And only take what you need" (65). He teaches Petra how to respect the land in their search by giving the land autonomy. He also poses the question, "who says what a rock is worth?" (65). Petra's activism is inclusionary of human and more-than-human creatures and is informed by a nonextractive praxis.

Once Petra discovers how far the Collective is willing to go to justify their nation-building, Petra's determination to tell her Cuentos becomes a method to counter erasure and violence. The Collective erases all stories including folktales, didactic storytelling, and histories because they can lead to challenging the nation, halting production, and slowing down colonization. Lita's legacy represents to Petra everything that the Collective despises—growing old, telling stories, and connecting the mind, body, and spirit. Lita taught Petra that cuentos are necessary to understand what is happening in the world, to ease our spirits, and to teach the future generations. Before the world ends, Lita serves Petra hot chocolate and tells her a cuento to distract Petra from her fears of going on the ship. When Petra expresses fear, Lita tells the cuento of the Fire Snake then, after noticing Petra's change in emotion, she asks, "'but for a moment, did you forget your troubles?'" (4). Cuentos offer relief necessary to keep moving forward during difficult times; on the other hand, the Collective sees these moments of relief as distractions that weigh down a person's psyche which results in halted productivity. For the Collective, productivity requires an empty "unburdened" psyche, and their society functions by deploying methods of surveillance and self-surveillance to monitor "usefulness". This is illustrated in Nyla's question to an aging Epsilon-5, "Do you still feel *useful*?" which

reveals the disposability of aging people via their “usefulness” to contribute to society in extractive ways (226). Although cuentos can offer wisdom, cuentos do not have to ask this “useful” question; for Petra, cuentos are magical and helpful in the same breath; they can be fun, playful, or scary—but, overall, they must be handled with care. The reader witnesses this care when Petra asks Lita, “What if I ruin your stories?” (5). Hesitant to take on a task at first, Petra learns to take stories on as her own, changing the end of Blancaflor’s cuento to evoke the necessary emotions that create a sense of family in the Zetas and Voxy. Her stories know no bounds—even if Voxy, a Collective member who grew up on the ship, does not know what Earth is or what drowning means, Petra’s cuentos incite in him the ability to question alongside the passion to grow, to risk, and to leave the Collective—all things necessary to start a future that learns from its past and honors the sacrifices of those before.

The magic in storytelling is uplifted as the past becomes integral to starting the future. The Collective does not comprehend how magic and the past illuminates a future, and this is shown when Crick, a member of the Collective, responds, “Not being tethered to tradition allows us to be logical” (258). Therefore, the Collective invests in notions of the Cartesian split where the mind is privileged over the body, and essentially, disconnected; the Collective makes this split possible by erasing memories by hooking up the body to the status machine and wiping the memories gone. This process is painful without the proper mind-easing medications created and administered by the Collective. The Collective tries to wipe Petra’s memories, and they fail. Petra’s attempted memory erasure does the opposite of what the Collective intended, and instead, sends her to an

epiphany for the future. This epiphany exists within a Dream World rather than the explainable, efficient world that the Collective praises. In the Dream World, figures from her past such as Lita, Ben, and her pets guide Petra. Chapter twenty-seven becomes the most magical of all chapters in terms of imagery and context: Petra is brought to this Dream World through her mind but experiences it through her body as the first signal to this world is ranchero music where “even here, in this dream world, I trust my ears more than my eyes” (262). Through the world, she is able to ask herself, “if millions took this path before, why am I not braver?” (266). Petra’s boldness to ask herself this demonstrates the significance of ancestors since “by honoring the past, our ancestors, our cultures [...] we become better” (258). The Dream World shows Petra what it would be like without Cuentos, and Petra contends with its darkness where there was “no one to hold [her] hand,” an equivalent to a state of nothingness because “a world without stories is lost” (266). In “Does Every Latine Story Have to be About Magical Realism?,” Vanessa Angélica Villarreal writes about the significance of ancestors and the magical to grapple with past traumas and understand our current realities. In eschewing Western divisions of past/present/future and magical/real, Villarreal writes how for her:

fantasy is the only language I have for memory, a consciousness shaped by absence, by ghosts, by loss, the violence of borders, the amnesia of history. Magic is the only form of communion I have with that loss—coming back to my ancestral practices is a folding of time, joining me in the now with those we’ve forgotten through ritual. (2022)

The Last Cuentista grapples with similar issues of erasure that Villarreal's *Magical Realism* (2024) contends with regarding state violence and historical amnesia. As a writer and teller of stories, Villarreal notes how "writing is the only way I know to recover my people from the nothing of forgetting, to resist the erasure of the border and its constant overwriting of history, to salvage the disappearing" (74). I assert that this is what is at stake for *The Last Cuentista*. Prioritizing ancestors and the magical becomes an act of resistance against a culture of erasure and efficiency enforced by the State, reminding young readers to keep dreaming and to keep the stories we grow up with, those that foster this dreaming and feeling, close. When shared with our chosen families, the childhood stories we grow up with can inspire revolutionary responses and deepen queer family ties.

California Dreamin': The Specter of Capitalism and Anti-immigration Rhetoric in *Sanctuary*

Like *The Last Cuentista*, *Sanctuary* takes place in the future, specifically in 2032, a time marked by longtime, intense anti-immigration policy in the United States. During this time, citizenship and the body have physically become inextricably linked as all U.S. citizens are chipped at birth and checkers are placed all over city buildings. The novel's protagonist, Valentina González Ramirez, or Vali, is an undocumented teenage girl living in Vermont with her mother and brother in a mixed status family. In order to pass as U.S. citizens, Vali and her mother attain counterfeit chips underneath their skin which can falter at any moment and would make them subject to detainment if discovered. Thus, the

government encourages self-surveillance of civilians and actively constructs a biologically deterministic definition of citizenship—anyone without the chip embedded within their body should not exist. The U.S. functions as a surveillance state by monitoring the internet, keeping track of each person that walks through government facilities, and ensuring that the president’s holographic image can appear at any time in any place to voice messages to the people. One day, Vali and others monitor the dark web and witness the heavily militarized border shoot a teenage girl for trying to cross the border. Due to the tension that her death reveals, California declares itself a sanctuary state for immigrants. Upon hearing the news, they decide to make the journey to Sister Lottie on the east coast who will help the family get to California; however, on their journey, her mother is detained, and the family is separated. Now, Vali must travel across the country with her brother. Like Petra Peña, Vali takes on the task of preserving familia in a future that aims to erase them from existence. *Sanctuary* provides young audiences with a “what if” whose roots are located in our current political, environmental state while presenting a young Latina who prioritizes her migrant community and family within a Southwest, U.S. landscape.

The surveillance state of the United States in *Sanctuary* erases the struggles of immigrant communities by utilizing the media to pathologize migration; however, as a refugee herself, Vali challenges this by questioning how media operates and constructs narrative. The media, in *Sanctuary*, is government-run which means that it controls channels, websites, and connections for civilians, leaving out what is considered “dark web” channels. In the opening chapter, a young girl straddles the constructed Great

American Wall, or the militarized wall that separates California from Mexico, and as a result, is killed by military officers. Vali nicknames this wall “the Grotesque Wall” to emphasize its horror produced by the ongoing murders of people attempting to cross; in doing so, Vali reveals the structural violence that permeates immigrant communities already, showing how technology can be used to aid state-sanctioned violence like it has today with the rise of drones and other militarized technology. Vali recalls how the Great American Wall was built in San Diego and had to be “extended across all the southern states that touched the border—Arizona, New Mexico, Texas” (33). The militarization of the border via the Great American Wall, otherwise a monument to xenophobia like the “Wall” that Trump has proposed throughout the years, justifies violence against migrants while simultaneously exploiting their labor. The young girl who is literally on the border wall is shot fifteen times, “one for each year of her life” (Mendoza and Sher 1). As Vali tries to learn her name, the reports flood in via the government news media before she can—some call the girl “an illegal fifteen year-old” or “a fifteen year-old immigrant. It depended on who was talking” (1). Thus, the media constructs a narrative of pathology for migrants as mainstream news channels report the girl as “*disease-ridden, illegal, criminal*” (1). These words of pathologization and criminalization push forward the narrative that immigrants contaminate the national body, and the racist rhetoric is reinforced when the president tells the nation, “nobody was safe from the “immigrant infestation” (33). The censorship and racist rhetoric of the media as well as the hyper-militarization of the Great American Wall are all part of the same project. It is significant to note that Vali, a teenage girl, witnesses the death of another teenager while she “was

supposed to be doing homework” (1). In recognizing everyday tasks, Vali identifies with the girl, noting, “my whole body was trembling for her. I wish I had even a smidge of her courage” (5). She realizes that this could have been her; after all, the girl died boldly attempting to do what Vali has been doing for years—seeking refuge. Finally, Vali engages in an act of remembrance for the girl as she chooses to remember the girl smiling. This act disrupts the media narrative that seeks to dispose of the girl’s existence and any attempt to sensationalize her murder. Vali becomes representative of the young readers who, like today, are bombarded with mainstream media that promotes a racist and xenophobic rhetoric of migrants and of Latinx peoples while they are the ones who have to live it day-to-day. Vali’s resonance with the girl will follow her into her journey to California as she fights for her life for refuge.

Vali’s courage to lead her birth and chosen family to sanctuary leads her to witness how the horrors of border militarization causes displacement, economic crises, and major destruction of the environment. In this future, the Vermont landscape is barren as it supplies barely enough agriculture to sustain the failing economy. Vali comments how, despite living in Vermont, she “had yet to experience a real blizzard or build a snowman” due to the ongoing drought as “the forests that used to cover the mountains around us were singed from all the wildfires” (32). I suggest that Vali encounters the market violence of the U.S. but in cities far from the US-Mexico border like Vermont and New York, and she takes mental note of them. She recognizes that market violence is why her family is in the States in the first place, noting how her family’s displacement occurred due to violence in Colombia where “big corporations were trying to take over

[her] town” and “people were getting death threats and being murdered as they tried to stop the corporations from taking the gold under [the] mountains” (17). It was a war that was “almost deadlier, because it was so stealthy and cruel” (17). Market violence can be silent or spectacular; moreover, Kristy Ulibarri claims:

What the security theater on the US-Mexico border, in immigrant courts, and in various towns across the United States shows us is that the global economy needs legal and governmental institutions to maximize market “freedom” and to employ various forms of “security” that target undesirable populations and ultimately benefit desirable ones. National security advances capital gain. (35)

Mendoza and Sher show a “what if” case for a continuation of these actions by the U.S. government, and part of this theater includes masking economic, environmental, and humanitarian crises. For example, in New York, commercialism has overtaken the landscape and overwhelmed the people in an attempt to mask the ongoing economic and environmental crisis as Vali describes, “there were mounds of garbage and pay-by-the-ounce water fountains. All the storefronts had loud neon displays, promising everything for ten dollars or less” (125). By promising “good deals” through the “loud neon displays,” the commercial market promotes a facade that erases the “mounds of garbage” presumably created by these “good deals” and a crisis wherein folks have to pay for water, a sustenance needed to survive, by the ounce. Trash is seen again as a displacement of people for products in the capital market when the South is an “apocalyptic landscape” to Vali, where “all of southern Missouri was completely trashed” due to what can be assumed to have been “a series of tornadoes” (182). Like Vermont

and New York, Missouri is a site of devastation whose erasure, Vali notes, is aided by the government's lying news broadcasts. These conditions, paired with anti-immigrant policy, create an atmosphere where gendered violence and the devaluing of people and nature are permissible. On the other hand, Vali has moments where she pairs the loving memory of her father, mother, and later, fallen chosen family members, to the ocean. One could say the ocean becomes almost like a separate family member for Vali, and she appreciates all parts of it, including its fluidity and constantly being in motion. It is through Vali's appreciation of the ocean that rejects the devaluation of nature and people in favor of the market.

Moreover, Vali's mother's tenacity and resilience influences how Vali strives for community beyond bloodline, and the mother's migrant worker experience leads Vali to valuing life networks. In the Vermont town that Vali resides, migrants, like Mami, are described as ghosts that sustain the economy, made invisible and hypervisible by the U.S. security theater and state surveillance as they are exploited for their labor and deemed disposable. The migrants are invisible and yet made hypervisible through nation-state propaganda that led up to the building of the Great American Wall. Viewing Mami through Ulibarri's theorizations of market and border violence can assist us in understanding Vali's activism which takes a stand for humans and nature. Within Ulibarri's framework that leans on Mbembe's necropolitics, Mami is representative of the "death-in-life" status of the living dead that Mbembe describes as phantom-like and in constant state of terror (Mbembe 75). In describing an instance of sovereignty, Mbembe writes, "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is

disposable and who is not” (80). I relate her state, and that of the land in the book, to Sunaura Taylor’s disabled ecology, or “networks of disability that are created when ecosystems are corrupted and profoundly altered” (6). Vermont, Missouri, New York, and other states have been injured and so have people like Vali’s mother and Vali herself. Vali understands that she is disposable, too, unless she assumes the role of Amelia Catherine Davis, her counterfeit chip identity. To combat the idea that any life is disposable, Mami models the importance of prayer for healing and of familia as her rules for survival are as listed:

1. Love all creatures, great and small.
2. Quit your worrying, and praise God you’re alive.
3. Protect your family at all costs.

Hierarchy is dismantled in rule number one where one must love all creatures “great and small” alike; similarly, rule number three ensures that “all creatures” are a part of the family that one must protect “at all costs” (13). She and her brother, Ernie, find family within the group they traveled with which includes Rosa, Tomas, Guadalupe, Volcanoman, and Malakas. Even long after the journey to finding sanctuary, Vali sees the people lost in the journey wherever she goes. She maintains contact with Malakas, a survivor of the group, and asks him, “Am I going crazy? Are you seeing people too?” (293). In seeing them everyone, she describes them as a pull like the ocean, where “it’s the pull of Rosa, Tomas, Guadalupe, Volcanoman. It’s the pull of Malakas’s lola and my mami and papi. It’s us, standing on this patch of land called Sanctuary, knowing we can’t be free until they are free too” (304). Despite having survived, Vali does not feel free

because she knows about the people who may never be and that are not yet free. She sees the living dead and feels their ghostly pull even as they are not physically present. Like ghosts, their stories and journeys take shape, and they are everywhere. Stories like Vali's and Petra's are apocalyptic, and yet, they are the "what if's" that contain real and material fears stemming from systemic violence. Through Chicanafuturism, we can examine closely the relationship between activism and environmentalism.

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